



XELUCHA

AND OTHERS

M.P. SH

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M. P. SHIEL
and
HIS WORK

This long awaited volume *Xelucha and Others* by Matthew Phipps Shiel (1865-1947) was announced for publication years ago. Shiel, an old friend of August Derleth, especially revised "Xelucha" for this collection. Here are such stories as "The House of Sounds", which H. P. Lovecraft considered his undoubted masterpiece, a tale of Scandinavian horror on a sub-arctic island; "The Primate of the Rose", another story of condign punishment in the Poe tradition; "The Tale of Henry and Rowena" and "The Bride", ghost stories in which the motivating force is vengeance; "The Pale Ape", bearing kinship of a sort to the tale of lycanthropy; and the lead story, a hideous description of decay and corruption from beyond the grave.

Chance and the inevitable play a large part in the cosmos created by Shiel. His characters are larger than life, motivated sometimes by curiosity, more often by revenge, a misguided sense of justice, or by the external forces of society, nature, or the supernatural. Melodramatic and silly as many of his plots may sound in the summarizing, there is somehow, as in all great writers, stimulating experience in his work, due to the exceeding skill with which he manipulates his material. As Richard Strauss puts it, his unique style is stamped with "a white-hot enthusiasm."

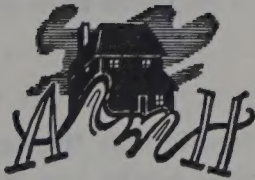
The author, who was born in Montserrat, West Indies, and lived in Sussex, England, wrote his first novel at the age of twelve. He was a prolific writer, of almost forty books, among which are some of the most unforgettable novels and short stories in the field

Continued on back flap

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and Others**

M. P. SHIEL

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Introduction

IF "brevity is the soul of wit", the short story must be a better art-form than the novel. It cannot be long-winded; it states its warp-and-woof of facts, and hastens on to drop a hint of the larger fact inherent in, resultant from, those facts. And though those facts are a trouble, there is "a happy issue out of all that affliction": the *end* of it all is a happy something. Probably in the Victorian Age the short-story saw its heyday, when that inventor, Poe, still influenced, and it was considered that every tale must be the expression of an "idea". I remember Jerome K. Jerome coming in flushed, announcing, "I dreamt the idea of a story last night—something spanking, my boys"—this "*idea*" being in every case some new happiness attained by the operation of some new plot, or plait, of events. Now, there are two types of happy endings—happy for characters of the tale, and, a still better type, happy for the reader; the novel perhaps excelling in the first type (since the reader is longer in the characters' company), the short excelling in the better type. In each case a happy ending, since the whole thing should be based on facts, be true to Life: and the fact is that Life after its cares ends happily, men being no longer cave-dwellers, lake-dwellers, nor linnets any longer lizards; and the dead lie smiling to themselves: this is the outstanding fact about Life, that it ends happily, and this is the tale that the tale-teller

has to tell in many a tone: one tale is a better tale than another in so far as its end is happier. Which is hardly to say that there are no good "tragedies"—Othello, Macbeth—but after the tragedy for the characters there should be a knowing mute look, an innuendo of happiness for the reader, as in the tale of Buddhism, of Christianity, of Romeo and Juliet: look at two Italian families at feud; where Antonio comes across Antonello rapiers rush out, red wets the pavement: what a wound in the vitals of Society! is there no hellebore can medicine this haemorrhage? Yes, one: a son and a daughter of the families fall in love; this ends in their death; but over their tomb the two families are moved to a mood of amity: the wound is stanchd: tragedy black enough, but there is a happy issue—for Man—for the citizen reader. Hence the tale of Christianity—"the old, old story"—is the best that was ever told: tragedy, yes: the hero actually dies; but the nimble being springs up again. And all the details of the tale are in excelsis: Buddha lives happy ever after, but not at the right hand of the Divinity; he suffered to enlighten a tribe, but did not die to rescue a world—*this* world in which the reader is: so that in one tale we have both types of happy ending.

In the ghost-tale, too, the reader reaps: he will presently be himself a ghost, and will dominate; in the detective-tale, in consenting to the solution, he attributes that solution to his own wit, solacing his self-love; and in other tales of a tragic diartesis, of which there are some in the following collection, let the reader see whether or not *he* is somehow the better in that events took place as stated: if so, he has a good tale; if not, he has a tale less good, this being the best that can be said of it.

—M. P. Shiel.

**Xelucha
and Others**

Xélucha

"He goeth after her . . . and knoweth not . . ."

(FROM A DIARY)

THREE days ago! by heaven, it seems an age. But I am shaken—my reason is debauched. A while since I fell into a coma precisely resembling an attack of *petit mal*. "Tombs, and worms, and epitaphs"—that is the fantasy of my dream. At my age, with my physique, to walk staggering, like a man stricken! But all that will pass: I must collect myself—my reason is debauched. Three days ago! it seems an age! Sitting on the floor before an old cista full of letters, I lighted upon a packet of Cosmo's. Why, I had forgotten them! they are turning sere! Truly, I can no more call myself a young man. I sat reading, listlessly, rapt back by memory. But to muse is to be lost! of *that* evil habit I must wring the neck, or look to perish. Once more I threaded the mazy sphere-harmony of the minuet, reeled in the waltz, long pomps of candelabra, the noon-day of the bacchanal, about me. Cosmo was the very tsar and maharajah of the Sybarites! the Priap of the *détraqués*! In every unexpected alcove of his Roman Villa was a couch, raised high, with necessary foot-stool, flanked and canopied with mirrors of clarified gold. Consumption fastened upon him; reclining at last at table, he could, till

warmed, scarce lift the wine! his eyes were like glow-worms coiled together! haloed with vaporous emanations of phosphorus! Desperate, one could see, was his struggle with the Devourer. But to the end the princely smile persisted; to the end—to the last day—he continued among that comic crew unchallenged choragus of all the rites, I will not say of Paphos, but of Chemos! and Baal-Peor! Warmed, he did not refuse the revel, the dance, the darkened chamber. It was black, that chamber, rayless; approached by a secret passage; in shape circular; the air hot, haunted by odours of balms, bdellium, hints of dulcimer, flute, and all around it ottomans of Morocco. Here Lucy Hill stabbed to the heart Caccofogo, mistaking the scar on his back for the scar of Soriac. In a bath of malachite the Princess Egla, waking late one morning, found Cosmo lying stiffly dead, the bath-water covering him wholly.

“But in God’s name, Mérimée!” (so he wrote), “to think of Xélucha dead! Xélucha! Can a moon-beam, then, perish of suppurations? Can the rainbow be eaten by worms? Ha! ha! ha! laugh with me, my friend: *‘elle dérangera l’Enfer’*! She will introduce the *pas de tarantule* into Tophet! Xélucha, the feminine! Xélucha recalling the splendid harlots of history! Weep with me—*manat rara meas lacrima per genas*! expert as Thargelia; cultured as Aspatia; purple as Semiramis. She comprehended the human tabernacle, my friend, its secret springs and tempers, more intimately than any *savant* of Salamanca who breathes. *Tarare*—but Xélucha is not dead! Vitality is not mortal; you cannot wrap flame in a shroud. Xélucha! where, then, is she? Translated, perhaps—rapt to a constellation like the daughter of Leda. She journeyed to

Hindostan, accompanied by the train and appurtenance of a Begum, threatening descent upon the Emperor of Tartary. I spoke of the desolation of the West; she kissed me, and promised return. Mentioned you, too, Mérimée—'her Conqueror'—'Mérimée, Destroyer of Woman.' Breaths from the conservatory rioted among her blowing hair, threads of it astray over that thulite tint you know. Costumed cap-à-pie, she had, my friend, the dainty completeness of a daisy mirrored bright in the eye of the browsing brute. A simile of Milton had for years, she said, inflamed the lust of her eye: 'The barren plains of Sericana, where Chinese drive with sails and wind their cany wagons light'. I, and the Sabaeans, she assured me, wrongly considered Flame the whole of being; the other half of things being Aristotle's quintessential Light. In the Ourania Hierarchia and the Faust-book you meet a completeness: burning Seraph, Cherûb full of eyes. Xélucha combined them. She would reconquer the Orient for Dionysius, and return. I heard of her blazing at Delhi; drawn in a chariot by lions. Then this rumour—probably false. Like Odin, Arthur, and the rest, Xélucha—will reappear."

Soon subsequently Cosmo lay down in his balneum of malachite, and slept, having drawn over him the water as a coverlet. I, in England, heard little of Xélucha: first that she was alive, then dead, then had alighted at old Tadmor in the Wilderness, Palmyra now. Nor did I greatly care, Xelucha having long since turned to apples of Sodom in my mouth. Till I sat by the cista of letters and re-read Cosmo, she had for some years passed from my active memories.

The habit is now confirmed in me of spending the greater part of the day in sleep, while by night I wander far and

wide through the city under the sedative influence of a tincture which has become necessary to my life. Such an existence of shadow is not without charm; nor, I think, could many minds be subjected to its conditions without elevation, deepened awe. To travel alone with the Primordial cannot but be solemn. The moon is of the hue of the glow-worm; and Night of the sepulchre. Nux bore not less Thanatos than Hypnos, and the bitter tears of Isis redundate to a flood. At three, if a cab rolls by, the sound has the augustness of thunder. Once, at two, near a corner, I came upon a priest, seated, dead, leering, his legs bent. One arm, supported on a knee, pointed with accusing forefinger upward. By exact observation, I found that he indicated Betelgeuse, the star 'α' of rainy Orion. He was hideously swollen, having perished of dropsy. Thus in all Supremes is a *grotesquerie*; and one of the sons of Night is—Buffo.

In a London square deserted, I imagine, even in the day, I was aware of the metallic, silvery-clinking approach of little shoes. It was three in a morning of winter, a day after my rediscovery of Cosmo. I had stood by a railing, looking at clouds sailing as under the steering of a moon wrapped in cloaks of inclemency. Turning, I saw a little lady, very gloriously dressed. She had walked straight to me. Her head was bare, and crisped with ripples which rolled to a globe, rich with jewels, at her nape. In the redundancy of her décolleté development, she resembled Parvati, love-goddess of the luscious fancy of the Brahmin.

She addressed to me the question:

"What are you doing there, darling?"

Her loveliness stirred me, and Night is *bon camarade*. I replied:

"Sunning myself by means of the moon."

"All that is borrowed lustre," he returned, "you have got it from old Drummond's *Flowers of Sion*."

Looking back, I cannot remember that this reply astonished me, though it should—of course—have done so. I said:

"On my soul, no; but you?"

"You might guess whence *I* come!"

"You are dazzling: you come from Paz."

"Oh, farther than that, my son! Say a subscription ball in Soho."

"Yes? . . . and alone? in the cold? on foot . . . ?"

"Why, I am old, and a philosopher. I can pick you out riding Andromeda yonder from the ridden Ram. They are in error, M'sieur, who suppose an atmosphere on the broad side of the moon. I have reason to believe that on Mars dwells a race whose lids are transparent like glass; so that the eyes are visible during sleep; and every dream moves imaged forth to the beholder in tiny panorama on the iris. You cannot imagine me a mere *fille*! To be escorted is to admit yourself a woman, and that is improper in Nowhere. Young Enos drives an *equipage à quatre*, but Artemis 'walks' alone. Get out of my borrowed light in the name of Diogenes! I am going home."

"Far?"

"Near Piccadilly."

"But a cab?"

"No cabs for *me*, thank you. The distance is a mere nothing. Come."

We set off. My companion at once put an interval between us, quoting from the *Spanish Curate* that the open is an

enemy to love. The Talmudists, she twice insisted, rightly held the hand the sacreddest part of the person, and at that point also contact was for the moment interdict. Her walk was extremely rapid. I followed. Not a cat was anywhere visible. We reached at length the door of a mansion in St. James's: no light, it seemed tenantless, windows uncurtained, pasted across, some of them, with the words, To Let. My companion, however, flitted up the steps, and, beckoning, passed inward. I, following, slammed the door, and was in darkness. I heard her ascend, and presently a region of glimmer above revealed a stairway, curving broadly up. On that lowest floor where I stood was no carpet, nor furniture; the dust thick. I had begun to mount when, to my surprise, she stood by my side, returned; and whispered:

"To the very top, darling."

She soared nimbly up, anticipating me. Higher, I could no longer doubt that the house was empty but for us. All was a vacuum full of dust and echoes. But at the top light streamed from a door, and I entered a good-sized saloon. I was dazzled by the sudden resplendence of the apartment, at the middle of which was a spread table, square, opulent with gold plate, fruit, dishes; three ponderous chandeliers of electric light above; and I noticed also (what was very *bizarre*) one little candlestick of tin containing an old curve of tallow, on the table. But the impression of the whole was one of gorgeousness not less than Assyrian: an ivory couch at one end of the table had a head-piece of chalcedony forming a sea for the sport of emerald ichthyosauri; copper-coloured hangings, panelled with mirrors, corresponded with a dome of copper; yet this latter, I now remember, produced upon my glance

an impression of actual grime. My companion reclined on a sigma couch, raised to the table-level in the Semitic manner, visible to her saffron slippers of satin. She pointed me a seat opposite, the incongruity of whose presence in the midst of this pomp so tickled me, that no power could have kept me from a smile: it was a mean chair, all wood, nor was I long in discovering one leg shorter than its fellows.

She indicated wine in a black bottle, and a tumbler, but herself made no pretence of drinking or eating, lay on hip and elbow, *petite*, resplendent, and gazed gravely upward. I, however, drank.

"You are tired," I said, "one sees that."

"It is precious little that *you see!*" she returned, dreamy, hardly glancing.

"How! your mood is changed, then? You are morose."

"You never, I think, saw a Norse passage-grave?"

"And abrupt."

"Never?"

"A passage-grave? No."

"It is worth a journey! They are circular chambers of stone, covered by earth-mounds, with a "passage" of slabs connecting them with the outer air. All round the chamber the dead sit, head resting on bent knees, and consult together in silence."

"Drink wine with me, and be less Tartarean."

"You certainly seem to be a fool," she replied with a sardonic iciness. "Is it not, then, highly romantic? They belong, you know, to the Neolithic Age. As the teeth fall, one by one, from the lipless mouths—they are caught by the lap. When the lap thins—they roll to the floor. Thereafter, every tooth

that drops all round the chamber sharply breaks the silence."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Yes. It is like a century-slow dripping in some cavern of the far subterrene."

"Ha! ha! This wine seems heady! They express themselves in a dialect largely dental."

"The Ape, on the other hand, in a language wholly guttural."

A town-clock tolled four. Our talk was holed with silences, and heavy-paced. The wine's exhalation reached my brain: I saw her through mist, dilating large, uncertain, shrinking again to dainty compactness. But amorousness had died within me.

"Do you know," she asked, "what has been discovered in one of the Danish *Kjökkenmöddings* by a little boy? It was ghastly. The skeleton of a huge fish with human—"

"You are most unhappy."

"Be silent."

"You are full of care."

"I think you a great fool."

"You are racked with misery."

"You are a child. You have not an instinct of the meaning of the words."

"How! Am I not a man? I, too, miserable, careful?"

"You are not, really, *anything*—until you can create."

"Create what?"

"Matter."

"That is foppish. Matter cannot be created, nor destroyed."

"Truly, then, you must be a creature of unusually weak intellect. I see that now. Matter does not exist, then, there is

no such thing, really—it is an appearance, a spectrum—every writer not imbecile from Plato to Fichte has, voluntary or involuntary, proved that for your good. To create it is to produce an impression of its reality upon the senses; to destroy it is to wipe a wet rag across a scribbled slate.”

“Perhaps. I do not care. Since no one can do it.”

“No one? You are mere embryo—”

“Who, then?”

“*Anyone* whose power of Will is equivalent to the gravitating force of a star of the First Magnitude.”

“Ha! ha! ha! By heaven, you choose to be facetious. Are there, then, wills of such equivalence?”

“There have been three, the founders of religions. There was a fourth: a cobbler of Herculaneum, whose volition induced the cataclysm of Vesuvius in '79, in direct opposition to the gravity of Sirius. There are more fames than *you* have ever sung, you know. The greater number of disembodied spirits, too, I feel certain—”

“By heaven, I cannot but think you full of sorrow! Poor wight! come, drink with me. The wine is thick and boon. Is it not Setian? It makes you sway and swell before me, I swear, like a purple cloud of evening—”

“But you are mere ponderance!—I did not know that!—you are no companion! your little interest revolves round the lowest centres.”

“Come—forget your agonies—”

“What, think you, is the portion of the buried body first sought by the worm?”

“The eyes! the eyes!”

“You are *hideously* wrong—you are so *utterly* at sea—”

"My God!"

She had bent forward with such rage of contradiction as to approach me closely. A loose gown of amber silk, wide-sleeved, had replaced her ball attire, though at what opportunity I could not guess; wondering, I noticed it as she now placed her palms far forth upon the table. A sudden wafture as of orange-flowers, mingled with the faint odour of mortality over-ready for the tomb, greeted my sense. A chill crept upon my flesh.

"You are so *hopelessly* at fault—"

"For God's sake—"

"You are so *miserably* deluded! Not the eyes *at all!*"

"Then, in Heaven's name, what?"

Five tolled from a clock.

"The *Uvula!* that drop of mucous flesh, you know, suspended from the palate above the glottis: they eat through the face-cloth and cheek, or crawl by the lips between defective teeth, filling the mouth. They make straight for it: it is the *deliciae* of the vault."

At her horror of interest I grew sick, at her odour, and her words. Some unspeakable sense of insignificance, of debility, held me dumb.

"You say I am full of sorrows. You say I am racked with woe; that I gnash with anguish. Well, you are a child in intellect. You use words without realisation of meaning like those minds in what Leibnitz calls 'symbolical consciousness.' But suppose it were so—"

"It *is* so."

"You know nothing."

"I see you twist and grind. Your eyes are very pale. I

thought they were hazel: they are of the bluishness of phosphorous shimmerings seen in darkness."

"That proves nothing."

"But the 'white' of the sclerotic is dyed to yellow. And you look inward. Why do you look so palely inward, so woe-worn, upon your soul? Why can you speak of nothing but of the sepulchre, and its rottenness? Your eyes seem to me wan with centuries of vigil, with mysteries and millenniums of pain."

"Pain! but you know so *little* of it! you are wind and words! of its philosophy and *rationale* nothing!"

"Who knows?"

"I will give you a hint. Pain is the sub-consciousness in conscious creatures of Eternity, and of eternal loss. The least prick of a pin not Pæan and Æsculapius and the powers of heaven and hell can utterly heal. Of an everlasting loss of wholeness the conscious body is sub-conscious, and 'pain' is its sigh at the tragedy. So with all pain—greater, the greater the loss. The hugest of losses is, of course, the loss of Time. If you lose that, any of it, you plunge at once into the transcendentalisms, the infinitudes, of Loss; if you lose *all of it*—"

"But you so wildly exaggerate! Ha! ha! You rant, I tell you, of common-places with the woe—"

"Hell is where a clear, untrammelled Spirit is sub-conscious of lost Time; where it writhes with envy of the living world; *hating* it for ever, and all the sons of Life!"

"But curb yourself! Drink—I implore—I *implore*—for God's sake—but *once*—"

"To *hasten* to the snare—that is woe! to drive your ship upon the *lighthouse* rock—that is Marah! To wake, and feel

it irrevocably true that you went after her—and *the dead were there*—and her guests were in the depths of hell—and *you did not know it!*—though you *might* have. Look out upon the houses of the city this dawning day: not one, I tell you, but in it haunts some soul—walking up and down the old theatre of its little Day—goading imagination by a thousand childish tricks, vraisemblances—elaborately duping itself into the fantasy *that it still lives*, that the chance of life is not for ever and for ever lost—yet riving all the time with under-memories of the wasted Summer, the lapsed brief light between the two eternal glooms—riving I say and shriek to you!—riving, *Mérimée, you destroying fiend—*”

She had sprung—*tall* now, she seemed to me—between couch and table.

“*Mérimée!*” I screamed,—“*my* name, harlot, in your maniac mouth? By God, woman, you terrify me to death!”

I too sprang, the hairs of my head catching stiff horror from my fancies.

“Your name? Can you imagine me ignorant of your name, or anything concerning you? *Mérimée!* Why, did you not sit yesterday and read of me in a letter of Cosmo’s?”

“Ah-h . . . ,” hysteria bursting in sob and laughter from my arid lips—“Ah! ha! ha! *Xélucha!* My memory grows palsied and grey, *Xélucha!* pity me—my walk is in the very valley of shadow!—senile and sere!—observe my hair, *Xélucha*, its grizzled growth—trepidant, *Xélucha*, clouded—I am not the man you knew, *Xélucha*, in the palaces—of Cosmo! You are *Xélucha!*”

“You rave, poor worm!” she cried, her face contorted by a species of malicious contempt. “*Xélucha* died of cholera ten

years ago at Antioch. I wiped the froth from her lips. Her nose underwent a green decay before burial. So far sunken into the brain was the left eye—"

"You are—you are *Xélucha*!" I shrieked; "voices now of thunder howl it within my consciousness—and by the holy God, *Xélucha*, though you blight me with the breath of the hell you are, I shall clasp you,—living or damned—"

I rushed toward her. The word "Madman!" hissed as by the tongues of ten thousand serpents through the chamber, I heard; for a moment to my wild eyes there seemed to rear itself, swelling to the roof, a tower of ragged cloud, and, as my arms closed upon emptiness, I was tossed by the operation of some Behemoth potency backward to a wall of the chamber, where I fell, shocked into insensibility.

When the sun was low toward night, I lay awake, and listlessly observed the grimy roof, and the sordid chair, and the candlestick of tin, and the bottle of which I had drunk. The table was filthy, of deal, uncovered. All bore the appearance of having stood there for years. But for them, the room was void, the vision of luxury thinned to air. Sudden memory flashed upon me. I scrambled to my feet, and ran tottering, bawling, through the evening into the streets.

The Primate of the Rose

“‘FRIENDS of the Rose?’” said E. P. Crooks to Smyth one night, at the Savage Club: “is it an actual fact that there are secret societies in London?”

And Smyth, with his expression of lazy surprise, replied: “Why, yes. Ask me another time. Come and dine with us two, if you like.”

It is a wonder that Crichton Smyth ever did invite Crooks. As editor of *The Westminster Magazine*, he had long known Crooks as a little story-writer, and had never had any such impulse: but suddenly Englishmen, with their genius for discovery, had discovered that they had a Crooks; proceeded to pay him 9d. for writing “the”; and then Smyth, with his eyebrows of surprise, muttered: “Come and dine with us.”

Smyth was of that better aristocracy, the upper middle-class, which gives to England its ladies: slim, clean-looking, old-blooded—not much blood, and thin; but rare, like wine of Yquem.

Of another family was Crooks—a fatty little man, fat-cheeked, with an outsticking moustache that hung. Still, there was something or other in him—something brisk in his

glance, in the dash of his hair across his forehead; and if at seventeen he had vended soda-water from door to door, at twenty-six he was a graduate, and at thirty-six a star.

But he was a gay Romeo, Crooks—in a rather vulgar mood; and Smyth had a sister.

If one had prophesied to Smyth that his sister, Minna Smyth of the Smyths, could possibly commit follies for E. P. Crooks, or look twice at Crooks, Smyth would hardly have bothered to smile . . .

However, the human female can be pretty queer and wayward; and her heart is like spittle on the palm that the Tartar slaps—no telling which way it will pitch.

From that first night of the dinner Minna Smyth shewed herself amiable to the celebrity—a *chic* dinner of dated wines in a flat in Westminster; for editors are awfully well-to-do-people—do you know? The piano there was a mosaiced thing in mother-of-pearl; and in turning Miss Smyth's music, Crooks' fingers got positive magnetism, hers negative, and they met.

She was a tall, thin girl of twenty-five, very like Smyth, very English in type, pretty, but washed-out and superfine, with light eyes of the colour of quinine-solution which X-rays make "fluorescent". Was Crooks genuinely smitten with this? It is doubtful. Besides, he was married. But she was a conquest worth making, and he was a man ever on the *qui vive* to add yet a photo to his packet, and a feather to his cap.

Minna Smyth, for her part, took studiously from that night to feeding her mind on the spiced meat of Crooks' books, who, meanwhile, had retaliated upon Smyth by banqueting him at the National Liberal, and might drive home anon

with him from the Savage. Crooks felt that he was patronising Smyth; and Smyth felt that he was patronising Crooks: for when one had known a tremendous man in his days of "£2-a-thousand-words," one has no respect for his tremendousness—especially Smyth, who was the chilliest thing that the Heavens ever invented. At any rate, they became friendly.

During which time Crooks and Minna Smyth had a way of meeting at private views, lectures, concerts—meetings of which Smyth did not know; letters were written which Smyth did not see; and it happened one evening at the flat, at a moment when Smyth was in the next room, that Minna mentioned to Crooks in the course of conversation that on Friday nights her brother was out "at his secret society", and never came home till 4 a.m.

On this Crooks, picking up her hand, said to her: "I'll come on Friday night."

She looked at him under her eyes, meditating upon him; then moved her face from side to side, while her lips took the shape of "No."

"Something to *say*," said he: "I hope you aren't inexorable."

Her lids now veiled her eyes, while her bosom rose and rose, unloaded itself of a sigh, and tumbled back.

"Is it yes?" he whispered.

"*Crichton!*" she breathed, with a sudden expression of shrinking and fright in her eyes.

"Oh, I think that that will be all right about Crichton," Crooks said.

"You don't *know* him!" she whispered: "his nose goes white . . ."

Smyth now came in; and presently, when Minna had gone out, Crooks said to him: "By the way, how about that wondrous 'Friend of the Rose', Smyth, that you are always to tell me of?" He threw himself into roomy red velvet opposite Smyth's red velvet on the other side of a fire—it was December—and drank from a large and fragile glass.

"What can one tell of it, if it is a secret society?" Smyth asked, his eyebrows raised over lazy lids that seemed to strain to be open, for there was an ample valley of country between his eyebrows and his nose-tip.

"I mean to say—is the thing *real*? Is it like *London*?"—from Crooks, who had an inquisitive intellect, and, then, was ever on the quest of "copy". He added: "Years ago I wrote a story about a secret society—you must remember it; but I never for a moment believed that there are such things. Anarchism, yes—Freemasonry—the Irish—"

"Those are mushrooms," Smyth remarked, his lips giving out a trickle of thick cigar-smoke, languid as himself; while Crooks smoked a briar pipe.

"What! Freemasonry a mushroom?"—from Crooks—"on the contrary—"

"Comparatively, of course, I meant. And I don't call those secret societies, of whose existence and objects everyone knows. Where's the secrecy? . . . But there are others."

Crooks bent forward. He knew that Smyth was Cockney, as much a thing of London as was Charles Lamb, sometimes burrowing in some Slav night-club at the docks, or among "Ye Merrie Men", when supposed to be at holiday in Hom-burg, a being deeply initiated into London lore, knowing somewhat more behind those eyebrows of mild surprise than

he ever mentioned at table: hence Crooks' interest; and his interest, like his other emotions, was usually shown.

"But in London?" he said: "really, now? Why have I never dropped across them? In Paris, yes—"

Smyth answered—his taciturnity sometimes melted when the subject was London—"Paris is to London as a shilling dictionary to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Everything's in London."

"Except Paris"—from Crooks.

"Paris is, too: I could take you to the Bal Bullier within half-a-mile of here. Only, in Paris it has name and fame, in London it is lost."

"But this 'Rose' business—'secret societies'—you assure me they're a fact?"

"I am a member of two; I know of a third; and have suspicions of a fourth." Smyth laughed a little to himself.

"That's three, say"—Crooks had animated eyes—"now, tell me how I can join them all."

Smyth chuckled inwardly at this crude enthusiasm; and he said: "You don't seem quite to realise—they are *secret* societies. There are more multi-millionaires—more experts in Becquerel rays—than members. To become a member of those I know is about as rare a thing as the conjunction of four planets; and requires long preparation. You can't go about 'joining them' like that. One of them has consisted of sixteen members since the time of Edward II, another of twenty-three—"

"But what are they *for*?" Crooks fretfully cried: "what's—what's their *motif*, their *idea*?"

"Different *motifs*. Most are benevolent, I think. All mystic."

"Then, why on earth are they secret, if they are benevolent?" Crooks peered piercingly into it with the interest of the perplexed busybody: "the mere fact that they are benevolent—"

"Different reasons for secrecy: some are secret to avoid—hanging sometimes." Smyth showed his teeth in a silent laugh.

"Then, I don't tumble," from Crooks—"why need they avoid hanging, if they are benevolent?"

"Seems fairly obvious to me," Smyth remarked, his straining lids half-shut behind his *pince-nez*: "there are three types of really secret societies—absurd, obscene, and benevolent: and the benevolent ones can only be created for one reason—because Government, so far, is immature and defective. They assist Government by taking the law into their own hands, executing justice, doing good, in cases where Government can't, or won't, yet do it, and calling upon God to witness in a mystic mood."

"Oho! Is that it? Then, they have my approval. And as to these 'Friends of the Rose', tell me the particular—"

"It was a bad day for me," Smyth interrupted, "when I mentioned to you 'Friends of the Rose', for you have left me no peace since. What business is it of yours? And what can you expect me to tell? Does the great Crooks take it for granted that secrets guarded six centuries will be blabbed to him for the asking? You may be perfectly certain, for instance, that 'Friends of the Rose' is not really their name—though it is not unlike that. What can one tell? Perhaps I may tell that the membership has always been limited to sixteen; or I may tell that there is a certain apartment some-

where in London of whose existence only one man at a time—occasionally two—has known for five hundred years.”

Crooks winked quick, hearing it: then threw his face about, frowning, fretted, almost offended, for he disliked being “out of” anything. “Apartment,” he muttered . . . “And who is that one man who knows?”

“The Primate of the Society.”

“Primate . . .” Crooks meditated it over the fire: then animatedly looked up to ask: “Now, where can that apartment be?”

On which Smyth, tickled, let himself to into a sort of laugh, saying: “What, want to take a lady there? I am sorry I can’t tell you, if only because I have no notion myself. But when the Primate dies—he is a very old man—lives in Camden Town—I shall know.”

“Oh, *you’ll* be Primate then?”

Smyth’s lids lay closed. He made no answer.

“I should just like half-an-hour’s interview with that ‘very old man who lives in Camden Town,’” Crooks mentioned.

And Smyth answered: “If you saw him hobbling along Gray’s Inn Road, it would not occur to you to glance twice at him. London is like that. We brush shoulders with angels at Charing Cross, little divining the depths that some common-looking type has dived, the oddity of his destiny, his store of lore, his giftedness, or the dignity on his head. I know an old pattern-maker in Wapping—”

But at this point Minna came in, and, as Crooks’ attention was drawn off, Smyth suddenly stopped.

That was a Wednesday.

Now, on Fridays Smyth invariably left his office an hour

earlier, dined at home, locked himself in his book-room for two hours, and then went out dumb, like monks, not to come back till the morning hours.

Years had seen no break in this routine; but this Friday there was a break: for, for some unknown reason, Smyth was back at home before eleven.

In Victoria Street he glanced up at his windows on the second floor; noticed that the drawing-room light seemed low behind the blinds; and muttered something to himself.

He then went up by the lift, opened the flat-door with his key—and did it noiselessly, though he was *far* from admitting to himself that he did it noiselessly. He now glanced into the kitchen, and his eyebrows went higher because of the fact that it was in darkness. He passed, on padded carpet, to two other rooms—no one there: the servants had perhaps gone to the theatre. He then stepped down a passage to the drawing-room door, and, still without sound, turned the handle. But that door was locked: and his eyebrows went higher still.

Standing there, he seemed to come to a sudden decision: and walked sharply, softly, out of the flat.

Down below he stepped into a by-street where there is a Police-Ambulance cot; and, standing in the shadow of this, looking toward Victoria Street, he waited.

After half-an-hour he saw Crooks come out of his "Mansion", saw him walk away with quite an air of jauntiness; and presently saw his drawing-room lights turned on full.

He slept at the Hotel Victoria that night; and the next morning turned up at Covent House the same cold Smyth as ever—made a jest with the lift-man, going up to his office;

and his sub-editor did not dream that day what was in him, nor that its name was Legion.

But in the afternoon his sister Minna, who had spent a day of wonderment and trembling, received a note "by hand" from him:

"Dear Minna,

"I regret that reasons have arisen which make it impossible for us to live any longer together. Pray write me by tomorrow whether you desire to stay on at the flat, or would rather that I took another for you.

"Yours,

"Crichton".

So they parted . . .

She, knowing that he was attached to the flat, left it for one in Maida Vale, he settling an income upon her. From that night of the lowered lights he did not see her again—not for an instant. To her prayers for an explanation he made no answer.

But his pain proved more than he had bargained for, and he would have done better to have left those rooms which had known her presence. Though not very visible to others, there was a friendship and link between them extremely sacred and sweet; and he pretty soon discovered that, in sending her away, he had plucked out his right eye. Sometimes for days now he would absent himself from the office; his thin, palish face went pinched and paler; some grey began to mingle with his hair; his taciturnity turned to something like dumbness.

But he never relented; until after six months, it came to his ears, through a doctor, that she was not well, and in a tragic fix. And then he wrote to her:

"Dear Minna,

"I know everything: and whatever there is to forgive I forgive. Please, dear, come back to my arms.

"Yours,

"Crichton".

She would not at first; but then the wings of love proved stronger than her shrinkings: and she took herself back to the old flat.

But she was not well: for she, too, had rued and gnashed, chewing the ashes of the fire of passion; so that daily he saw her vanishing like a shadow from him; and in a month she sighed at him, and died, leaving him a little girl to nurse.

As for Crooks, he was at Naples, and it was three months before he had definite knowledge that a child was born, a mother dead. Then he asserted himself. Since that Friday night of Smyth's earlier return he had had no interview with Smyth, for Minna, as it were on her knees, had ever pleaded with him, "Please, please, try not to meet Crichton!" But now Crooks asserted himself.

He sought out Smyth one night at the Savage, and, standing before Smyth's chair, said: "Smyth, I must have the child."

Smyth looked up from the slightly surprising thing in his *Standard* to the slightly surprising object before him, and said: "No."

"Then, I have to see her sometimes—fair's fair."

"If you like," Smyth muttered. "She is at my flat. Try not to see her often"—he read again.

So Crooks went and revolved philosophic thoughts over the insignificant stick of womanhood, that one could push into a jug: and she exclaimed on seeing his fat face, with hair stuck on it.

Then twice a month he went; and once, when, on meeting Smyth in Smyth's hall, he put out his hand, Smyth, with his eyebrows on high, let his long fingers be shaken. (Smyth, in fact, never participated in a hand-shake with any child of Adam, simply permitted and witnessed it, with surprise).

And when this had happened several times in the course of a year, one night found Crooks seated by the fire, the child on his knee, over against Smyth, as of old. Without greatly caring, he had set himself to be friends again with Smyth, doing it in a patronising mood, and so caring nothing for Smyth's surprise—nor, in truth, could he be sure that Smyth was more surprised than usual, since Smyth was for ever surprised. Moreover, Crooks' fame had lately swelled and mellowed; if he had an opinion on this or that matter, that was put into the newspapers; and he was puffed up, the fact being that the little men of his trade and grain have no essential self, nor impregnable self-estimation, which cannot be raised at all by any applause, nor depressed at all by any dispraise: but when the wind blows they are big, and when the wind lulls they are little. As for Crooks, at this time he felt that his presence honoured inventors and sceptics.

And "Cluck, cluck," he went, cantering his chick on his knee with a gee-up cackling; then: "I say, Smyth, did you ever become Primate of that Rose Society?"

"Yes," Smyth replied with surprise.

"Ah, you did. So *you* have the secret now of that mysterious 'Apartment'?"

"Yes," Smyth replied with surprise.

"Then," says Crooks to himself, "I shall *set foot* in that apartment sooner or later"; and he sat an hour with Smyth.

In this sort of relation they coexisted, until the midget Minna, fair and frail like its mother, could crawl, could walk, the months for mourning now long over, though Crichton Smyth still dressed in raiment of the raven—crape never more to leave that sleeve of his. Every Sunday sun-down found him in the Brompton Cemetery moping over a tomb; and most who saw him thought him cold; but some thought not. Meantime, Crooks came fairly regularly to the flat; and he said one night by the fire: "I shall leave off coming here, Smyth, if you don't talk to me. I have assumed that there can be no resentment left, since you realise that I loved Minna."

Smyth's lips oozed smoke a minute; then: "How many others did you love that year?"

"Several perhaps. I consider the question irrelevant—"

"How many have you loved since?"

"Several—many, perhaps. That is quite outside—"

"You are married."

"Yes, but I am impatient of argument on the subject, Smyth. It simply means that your views on sex-relations are different from mine; and, as mine are the offspring of thought—"

"I am not 'arguing' "—from Smyth with sleep-loaded lids: "it is not a question of anyone's 'views'. I merely said that

you are married, and it is a fact that, if a married man lets himself love a girl of the middle class, he runs a risk of killing her with shame. I do not say that it ought to be so—I am not arguing—I only state, what you know, that it *is* so—at present; and when a death occurs, you get murder. Of course, there is no law against it, but—” He stopped, passing his palm lazily across his raised forehead, his lids closed down, straining to open.

“Men are not exactly angels,” Crooks remarked.

“More like devils, some”—a mutter.

“Not referring to poor me?”

“Your existence seems to do a good deal of harm. I don’t know that you do any good.”

“You don’t know that my books do good?”

“No, I don’t know. I know that men are already getting past ‘novels’ without novelty, and that as soon as women cease to be children the last ‘novel’ will be written. Yours are entertaining, I believe—”

“Not prophetic? Not vital?”

This tickled three of Smyth’s ribs on the right side, and he let out on a breath of disdain: “Lot of Simple-Simons we still are.”

Now Crooks flushed a little, with “That’s right, Smyth, tell me about him!”

“Well, possibly you do some good,” Smyth drowsily droned: “I have read a page of yours of which I said ‘this is noble-minded’. Your sympathies are generous, and since your crudity suits the public, you may do some good. But sympathies without intellect can’t do much, and you are not an intellect—never had a thought that was new and true,

those of your notions that can be called your own being ridiculous. You know a little science in an amateur way—perhaps half as much as I know, which is hardly much—not half enough to have trained your brain to hardness and sharpness. And your manner of expression—you flourish and flood—I always have the feeling that you can't get over your gush of exultancy at the surprise of finding yourself a writer instead of vending ginger-beer. Not that you are really a writer—"

"Oh, Smyth, not even a writer now, old E.P."—from Crooks, with mockery.

"Of course not"—drowsily from Smyth: "a writer is a literateur, a man of letters, not of words, not wordy. I would bet that you couldn't even give a hard-headed definition of what writing *is*, what art *is*, any definition not wide of the simple truth. Don't you understand? we have two means of expressing ourselves—the tongue, the pen; and these two readily interchange their functions: we can write with the tongue, as when Demosthenes uttered his orations, or we can talk with the pen—like you. You tell your tales—don't write them. It is as if you related them to an audience, your books being the shorthand-man's report of what you said: and any one of a thousand other crowds of words would do as passably as your crowd does. The Writer's different: doesn't do it to get money—sure to have some money somehow, he's much a nimble lucky being—doesn't do it to get anything, but to give himself, and to rid his glands a bit of the richness of the fat of his genius: so that *his* pen is not a tongue, but a burin—writes in granite—every word, every letter, pregnant with rhyme and reason, with singing and

seeing; and the proof that *you* are not a writer is the volume of your vomit—and then its popularity, since it satisfies the public's demand for a certain commonness and counter-jumper familiarity, hardly possible to any man whose father was a gentleman, and for a deluge of wordiness: compare your two shelves of so-called 'books' with Homer's one or two, with Milton's, Flaubert's, Pater's, Plato's, René Maran's: it would be quite impossible to *write* in one life-time a quarter of all that froth of gingerbeer. So you are still a vendor of gingerbeer more than a writer, for—" But at this statement the little maid commenced to lament, and Crooks, handing her to her nurse, kissed her head, murmuring: "I'll go."

But, half-way to the door, he turned to say: "What about that 'Apartment' of yours, Smyth, that I am to be taken to? You said you'd consider it."

Smyth's answer was a little singular. With a push of the lips, pettish, yet mixed with a smile, he said: "Oh, you keep on about that!"

This was the *sixth* time that Crooks had asked—Smyth knew the number. At the first asking a flush of offence had touched Smyth's forehead at the cocky pushfulness that could prick Crooks to make such a request. But since then Smyth had begun to answer with a certain demur, a flirting reluctance, as of a girl who murmurs "no", but blushes "yes".

"Oh, you keep on about that . . ."

"Where's the harm?" asked Crooks on his next visit—"provided you can absolutely rely upon my lifelong silence. My curiosity, of course, is intrinsically *literary*. Energize my imagination with an actual sight of the place, and I tell you

what—I'll do a series of mystery-stories, and *The Westminster* shall have 'em."

And Smyth, his lids closed but for a slit that rested on Crooks, answered: "Ah, Crooks, don't tempt me."

It was, then, a question of temptation now? Crooks felt exultation. Had not the sister yielded to his tempting? The brother should be his conquest, too . . .

But on the next occasion of Smyth's temptation, Smyth said with a laugh: "You don't apparently care whether you urge me to the breach of a vow of office! And you do it with that same facile callousness with which you break your own marriage-vow."

"Smyth, you will not do as a conscience—you are too pale," said Crooks. "Please leave our evil marriage-customs out of the discussion. As to your 'vow of office', did you not yourself tell me that sometimes *two* men have known the alleged 'Apartment'?"

"Well, yes, I think I did say so. And you conceive, do you, that *you* have a right to be one of the two? Well, perhaps you have—I'll look into the question. But, if ever I do take you, I hope you are not nervous."

"Fancy a nervous E. P. Crooks! What is there to see, then?"

"It is a little—lethal."

"Then, I'm the man. But when?"

"I haven't said yes. Give one time. I have to get the approval of others . . ."

But only three weeks afterwards Smyth yielded.

"Very well," he said: "you shall see it; the thing's settled; your imagination shall be 'energized', as you call it. But you

are not permitted to know *where* the room is: you have to go to it blindfold. And, by the way, you must go disguised: just hang a beard round your ears—that'll do. And be before the Temple Church on Tuesday night, to hear the Law Courts clock strike eleven."

"*Fiet!*" Crooks cried.

That Tuesday night in October a high wind blew, and by the light of a moon that flew to encounter flying troops of cloud, Crooks stood looking at those eight old tombs, and the circular west-end of the church. The strand river had thinned now to a trickle of feet; in there in the secrecy of the Inn not a step passed; and Crooks felt upon him the mood of adventure: London was partly Baghdad; this an Arabian night: some time or other he'd make "copy" of the mood of it. To be disguised, too, was quite novel to him; anon he pawed his false beard with a mock pomposity; then he had the thought: "But why, after all, the disguise?" and just then eleven struck.

At its last stroke a step was on the pavers, and Crichton Smyth with his crape and raven dress was there. He put finger to lip when Crooks began to say something, beckoned, and Crooks followed out through Hare Court, by Middle Temple Lane, past the under-porter's lodge; when Smyth got into a coupé brougham waiting by the Griffin, Crooks followed in.

"I must blindfold you here," Smyth said at his ear.

"There remains the inward eye"—from Crooks: "blindfold away."

At once Smyth produced two pads of black cotton, and a black ribbon that had two narrower ribbons sewed to its ends;

cottons and ribbon he tied over Crooks' eyes and nose: and now it could be seen that the broad ribbon had crimson borders, and three roses embroidered on it.

As soon as it was secured, Smyth, unknown to Crooks, slipped a strip of brass-plate inside the band of Crooks' bowler-hat—a brass-plate on which were etched the words: "Edgar Crichton Smyth, P.". Whereupon the driver, as if he had waited for all this, went forward without being ordered.

But Crooks understood that they were going eastward. He heard Bennett's Clock quite near above strike the quarter-past. And presently the following words were uttered within that brougham:

CROOKS: Talk to me. I am lost in darkness. Silence must be awful to the blind.

SMYTH: I don't want to talk. This is not a night like every night for you and me.

CROOKS: You think something of that 'Apartment' of yours!

SMYTH: It is not an Apartment with 'To Let' in the window.

It has no window. I hope you have said your prayers.

CROOKS: Men of my birth have no need to say prayers, Smyth. Behind and underneath we are essentially religious; and our existence, properly understood, is a prayer.

SMYTH: Good thing you are religious behind.

CROOKS: Did you not *know* that I am?

SMYTH: No, how was I to know? You aren't where one sees you.

CROOKS: Smyth, you are the most—

SMYTH: Don't chatter.

Here Crooks could hear a tram droning somewhere

through the humdrum plod-clap plod-clap, of the brougham-horse's hoofs on asphalt; he thought to himself: "We must be somewhere in White-chapel," and presently they spoke again:

CROOKS: Is it far now?

SMYTH: Ten minutes.

CROOKS: I don't like the blindfolding, though—and, by the way, what is the disguise for? I understand the blindfold, but *why* the disguise?

SMYTH: You will soon guess why.

CROOKS: Your disguise is a mystery, and your blindfolding a plague. Ah, it must be sad to be blind!

SMYTH: What about being dead?

CROOKS: The dead don't know that they are blind, but the blind know that they are dead. Oh, it is a great thing to see the sun! to be alive, and see it. People don't realise, because the universe is not meant for men to see, but for the lords of older orbs than this to cast down their crowns before. Tomorrow morning when I have back my sight, I shall build me an altar.

SMYTH: Don't make any vows at it.

CROOKS: Certainly, Smyth, you are the most surly and cynical—

SMYTH: We get out here.

On this the brougham, without order, stopped; Smyth, having got out, led out Crooks; and, without order, the brougham rolled away.

As it had made several turnings, Crooks did not know in what district of London he now was—knew that it was East. But no sound of foot-falls passing here: only, he could hear

a rush of machinery going on somewhere.

"Those are alternators driven by steam-turbine," he said. "But are we in a street?"

"Sh-h, don't talk," said Smyth.

Crooks next felt himself led by the hand over what seemed to be cobble-stones, where the feet echoed, and there was a draught, so that he thought he must be under some tunnel, or vault. Then he felt himself in the open again, still going over old cobble-stones; and still the thump and rush of machinery reached the ear from somewhere. As for Smyth, he uttered not a word, and would listen to none.

Then there was a stoppage: Crooks knew that a door was being unlocked: he was led up two steps; the door was re-locked. And, hearing now a click at his ear, he could guess that Smyth had switched on the light of a torch.

He was next led over bare boards in some place that had a smell of soap and candles, tar and benzoline; and twice his steps tripped over what seemed to be empty bags. Then he was led slowly down some board steps; at the bottom of which Smyth stooped to unlock something—apparently a trapdoor in the ground.

Through this Crooks was led down, Smyth now saying to him: "Hold my jacket; these steps are narrow"—and Crooks went down some steep steps of stone, each step a jolt, where he ceased to hear the beat of the machinery.

After this he passed through a passage, apparently of hardened marl, markedly damp and clammy, and uneven to the feet, where even sightless eyes could see and feel the thickness of the darkness; at the far end of which Smyth was again known to open some door—evidently a very heavy

one—whose lock gnashed at the key, whose hinges chattered. From which point Crooks was led up steps so narrow, that he could easily feel the wall on either hand, they going now in single file.

To these steps there seemed no end—up and still up; and soon Crooks was afresh conscious of the throb and thresh of steam-machinery, jumbled with the hum of generators making their jews-harp music: this business and to-do seeming to increase on the ear, and then, as still up they climbed, seeming to die away. Whenever they came to a landing or passage, Crooks, who was fat, and panted, said to himself "at last"; but several times he had to recommence the climb; and he thought to himself: "Can it be the Tower of London? We are in some tower, within the thickness of the wall"; but he did not say anything: a mood of utter dumbness had come upon him.

At last, in moving along a passage over stone floor, he being then in front of Smyth, he stumbled, apparently in dust or rubbish; the next moment he was stopped, butting upon wall; and "Hallo", said he, "what's this?"

There was no reply . . .

Waiting against the wall for guidance, Crooks was conscious of a clang behind him, as of a massive portal slammed, and of the croak of a rusty lock being coaxed by a key. Then he was aware of a scraping, as if a ponderous object was being dragged scraping, as if a ponderous object was being dragged across the corridor; and simultaneously he was aware of an odour under his nose.

"Smyth!" he called out: "are we there?"

There was no reply . . .

Now he was aware of a match being struck, then of another, and another. By this time his bones were as cold as the stones that enclosed him.

He suddenly cried out: "Smyth! I am going to take the bandage off!"

Still there was no answer: but some moments afterwards there burst out upon his startled heart a most bizarre noise, a babbling, or lalling, half-talk, half-song, in some unknown tongue—from Smyth. The next instant Crooks had the bandage snatched from his eyes.

There was light—a pink light—brilliant at first to him; and by it he instantly realised that he was interned. He stood in a room of untooled ashlar some fourteen feet square, with a doorway three feet wide looking down a corridor three feet wide. It was the door of this doorway that had been slammed; but he could still look out, since the door had a hole in its iron—a hole Gothic in shape like the door itself; and outside the door stood an old pricket-candlestick of iron supporting seven candles, all alight, higher than a man's head, occupying all the breadth of the corridor.

Crooks understood that that scraping sound he had heard must have been due to the placing of the candlestick in position, and that the striking of the matches had been for lighting the seven candles, each of which had, before and behind it, a screen of pink porcelain with a pattern of roses—two perpendicular rows of roses—so that, as the candles got lower, they would still glow through a rose.

All this he noticed in some moments—also that there was a hand-bag open on the floor, out of which he assumed that Smyth had got the sort of linen amice, dotted with roses,

which he now wore round his shoulders; moreover, in some moments it had entered his consciousness that the dust and rubbish into which he had stumbled was made of the bones of dust and clothes of men who had ended their days there; moreover, he noticed that, hanging before the hole in the portal, was an old Toledo *puñal* of damascened steel, and he understood that this was mercifully meant for his use against himself, if he so chose. If he had doubted this—if he had cherished a hope—it would have vanished when he saw what was hanging on the shaft of the candlestick—a bit of ebony, or black marble, on which had been scribbled in red pencil:

MINNA AND FOUR OTHERS

But what most froze the current of Crook's blood was the horrid comedy of Smyth's psalmodying and dancing in his amice a yard beyond the candles, like one putting forth a spell of "woven paces and of waving hands", his head cast back, his gaze on Heaven—his pince-nez on his nose! But in what occult Chandaean was that bleating to Moloch and Baal that his tongue baa's and bleated? Crooks knew some languages: but this recitative had no affinity with any speech of men which he had ever conceived; and then that antic fandango-tangle of writhing palms and twining thighs that went on with the psalming, like some entranced wight steadily treading the treadmill of dance in the land of the tarantula—a piece of witchcraft as antique and aboriginal as torch-lit orgies of Sheba and Egypt . . .

His throat straining out of the hole—his eyes straining out

of his head—Crooks sent out to that dread dancer the whisper: "*Smyth, don't do it, Smyth . . .*"

After three minutes the ritual ceased: Smyth stood another minute, his brow bowed down, with muttering mouth; then took off and put the amice into a hand-bag; picked up and put on his hat; and, without speaking, went away, leaving the candles watching there, as for a wake.

Dark Lot of One Saul

WHAT I relate, ladies, is from a document found in a Cowling Library chest of records, written in a very odd hand on fifteen strips of a material resembling papyrus, yet hardly papyrus, and on two squares of parchment, which Prof. Stannistreet recognises as "trunkfish" skin; the seventeen pages being gummed together at top by a material like tar or pitch. A Note at the end in a different hand and ink, signed "E. G.", says that the document was got out of a portugal (a large variety of cask) by the Spanish galleass *Capitana* between the Bermudas and the Island of St. Thomas; and out of knowledge that at this point a valley in the sea-bottom goes down to a depth of four thousand fathoms affords, as will be noticed, a rather startling confirmation of the statements made in the document. The narrator, one Saul, was born sixteen to twenty years before the accession of Queen Elizabeth, and wrote about 1601, at the age of sixty, or so; and the correspondence of his statements with our modern knowledge is the more arresting, since, of course, a sailor of that period could only know anything of submarine facts by actual experience. I modify a few of his archaic expressions, guessing at some words where his ink ran.

* * *

This pressing paucity of air hath brought me to the writing of that which befel, to the end that I may send forth the writing from the cave in the portugal for the eye of who may find it, my pen being a splinter broken from the elephant's bones, mine ink pitch from the lake, and my paper the bulrush-pith. Beginning therefore with my birth, I say that my name in the world was James Dowdy Saul, I being the third child of Percy Dowdy Saul and of Martha his wife, born at Upland Mead, a farm in the freehold of my father, near the borough of Bideford, in Devon: in what year born I know not, knowing only this, that I was a well-grown stripling upon the coming of Her Grace to the throne.

I was early sent to be schooled by Dominie John Fisher in the borough, and had made good progress in the Latin Grammar (for my father would have me to be a clerk), when, at the age of fifteen, as I conjecture, I ran away, upon a fight with Martin Lutter, that was my eldest brother, to the end that I might adopt the sea as my calling. Thereupon for two years I was with the shipmaster, Edwin Occhines, in the balinger, *Dane*, trading with Channel ports; and at his demise took ship at Penzance with the notorious Master Thomas Stukely, who, like many another Devon gentleman, went apirating 'twixt Scilly and the Irish creeks. He set up a powerful intimacy with the Ulster gallant, Master Shan O'Neil, who many a time has patted me upon my back; but, after getting at loggerheads with Her Grace, he turned Papist, and set out with Don Sebastian of Portugal upon an African expedition, from which I felt constrained to withdraw myself.

Thereupon for a year, perhaps two, I was plying lawful traffic in the hoy, *Harry Mondroit*, 'twixt the Thames' mouth

and Antwerp; till, on a day, I fell in at "The Bell" in Greenwich with Master Francis Drake, a youth of twenty-five years, who was then gathering together mariners to go on his brigantine, the *Judith*, his purpose being to take part in Master John Hawkins' third expedition to the settlements in Espaniola.

Master Hawkins sailed from Plymouth in the *Jesus*, with four consorts, in October of the year 1567. After being mauled by an equinox storm in Biscay Bay, we refitted at the Canaries, and, having taken four hundred blacks on the Guinea coast, sailed for the West Indies, where we gained no little gold by our business. We then proceeded to Carthagena and Rio de la Hacha; but it should now be very well known how the *Jesus* lost her rudder; how, the ships' bottoms being fouled, we had perforce to run for San Juan de Ulloa in the Gulf of Mexico; and how, thirteen Spanish galleons and frigates having surprised us there, the Admiral de Bacan made with us a treaty the which he treacherously broke at high noon-day, putting upon us the loss of three ships and our treasure, the *Minion* and the *Judith* alone escaping: this I need not particularly relate.

The *Judith*, being of fifty tons portage only, and the *Minion* of less than one hundred, both were now crowded, with but little water aboard, and the store-chests empty. After lying three days outside the sand-ridge, we set sail on Saturday, the 25th September, having heard tell of a certain place on the east reaches of the Gulf where provisions might be got. This we reached on the 8th October, only to meet there little or nothing to our purpose; whereupon a council was called before Master Hawkins in the *Minion*, where one

hundred of us proffered ourselves to land, to the intent that so the rest might make their way again to England on short rations.

The haps of us who landed I will not particularise, though they were various, God wot, remaining in my head as a grievous dream, but a vague one, blotted out, alas, by that great thing which Almighty God hath ordained for a poor man like me. We wandered within the forests, anon shot at by Indians, our food being roots and berries, and within three weeks reached a Spanish station, whence we were sent captives into Mexico. There we were Christianly behaved to, fed, clothed, and then distributed among the plantations—a thing amazing to us, who were not ignorant of the pains put upon English sailors in Spain; but in those days no Holy Office was in Mexico, and on this count were we spared, some of us being bound over to be overseers, some to be handicraftsmen in the towns, etc. As for me, after an absence from it of seven months, I once more found myself in the township of San Juan de Ulloa, where, having ever a handy knack in carpentry, I had soon set myself up for a wright.

No one asked me aught as to my faith; I came and went as I thought good; nor was it long but I had got some knowledge of the Spanish tongue, stablished myself in the place, and taken to wife Lina, a wench of good liking, daughter of Señora Gomez of the *confiteria*, or sweetmeat-store; and out of her were born unto me Morales and Salvadora, two of the goodliest babes that ever I have beheld.

I abode in San Juan de Ulloa two years and eleven months: and these be the two years of quietness and happiness that I have had in this my life.

On the 13th afternoon of the month of February in the year 1571 I was wending homeward over the *prado* that separated my carpentry from the *confiteria* of my mother-in-law, when I saw four men approaching me, as to whom I straightway understood that men of San Juan they were not: one was a Black Friar, so hooded and cowed, that of his countenance nothing was discovered, save the light of his eyes; another was bearded—of the Order of Jesus; another wore the broad chapeau of a notary, and the fourth had the aspect of an alguazil, grasping a bâton in his hand. And, on seeing them, I seemed to give up heart and hope together: for a frigate hulk had cast anchor that morning beyond the sandridge, and I conjectured that these men were of her, were ministers of the Holy Office, and had heard of me while I was awork.

I have mentioned that no Inquisition was in Mexico afore 1571: but within the last months it had been bruited in San Juan that King Phillip, being timorous of English meddling in the gold-trade, and of the spread of English heresy, was pondering the setting up of the Holy Office over Espaniola. And so said, so done, in *my* case, at any rate, who, being the sole heretic in that place, was waylaid on the *prado* in the afternoon's glooming, and heard from the alguazil that word of the familiars: "follow on"; to be then led down the little *callejon* that runneth down from the *prado* to the coast, where a cockboat lay in waiting.

To the moment when they pushed me into the boat, I had not so much as implored one more embrace of my poor mate and babes, so dumb was I at the sudden woe: but in the boat I tumbled prone, although too tongue-tied to utter

prayer, whereupon an oarsman put paw upon me, with what I took to be a consoling movement: a gesture which set me belching forth into lamenting. But with no long dallying they put out, having me by my arms; and beyond the sand-ridge I was took upon the poop's ladder into the frigate, led away to the far end of the forecastle's vault, and there left with a rosca loaf, four onions, and a stoup of water in the sprit room, a very strait place cumbered by the bulk of the bow-sprit's end, and by the ends of a couple of culverins.

I know not yet whither it was the will of my captors to carry me, whether to Europe, or to some port of the Spanish Main; but this I know that the next noon when I was led apoop, no land was visible, and the sea had that hard aspect of the med-sea.

Our ship, the which was called the San Matteo, was a hulk of some four hundred tons portage, high afore, and high stuck up apoop, her fore castle having two tiers, and her poop's castle three, with culverins in their ports. Her top-sides were so tumbled home, that her breadth at the water may have been double her breadth at her wales, and she had not the new-fangled fore-and-abafts of Master Fletcher, such as the *Judith* wore to sail on a wind. But she was costly built, her squaresails being every one of the seven of heavy florence, broidered in the belly, and her fifty guns of good brass fabric. She was at this time driving free afore the wind under full spread, but with a rolling so restless as to be jeopardous, I judged. In fact, I took her for a crank pot, with such a tophammer and mass of upper-works, that she could scarce fail to dip her tier of falcons, if the sea should lash.

I was brought up to the master's room, the which was

being used as an audience-chamber, and there at a table beheld five men in file. He in the centre, who proved to be both my accuser and judge, presently gave me to know that the evidence against me had been laid before the Qualifiers of the Office—which Qualifiers I understood to be none other than themselves there present—and been approved by the said Qualifiers; and when I had given replies to a catalogue of interrogatories as to my way of life in San Juan, I was then straightway put to the question. My breast, God wot, was rent with terrors, but my bearing, I trust, was distinguished by Christian courage. The interview was but brief: I demurred to kiss the cross; whereupon the President addressed me—he being the Dominic that I saw on the *prado*, a man whose mass of wrinkles, although he was yet young, and his wry smile within a nest of wrinkles, I carry still in my mind. My rudeness, he said, would prove to be but puny: for that during the day I should be put to a second audience in order to move me to a confession, and after to the screws.

For that second audience I waited, but it came not: for, huddled up in a corner 'twixt the sprit's end and a culverin's end, I became more and more aware that the *San Matteo* was labouring in the sea, and by evening mine ears were crowded with the sounds of winds, so that I could no more hear the little sounds of the cook's house, the which was not in the hold, as with English vessels, but in a part of the fore castle abaft my cell. No food was brought me all that day, and I understood that all had enough to trouble them other than my unblest self.

I fell into a deep sleep, nor, I believe, awaked until near the next noon, though between noon and midnight was but

little difference in my prison. I now anew knew, as before, of a tumult of winds, and understood by the ship's motion that she was now fleeing afore the gale, with a swinging downhill gait. Toward night, being anhungered, I got to thumping in desperate wise upon my prison, but no signal was given me that any heard me, and doubtless I was unheard in that turmoil of sounds.

And again I fell into forgetfulness, and again about mid-day, as I conjecture, bounded awake, being now through the door, the which a stripling had just opened. He tumbled toward me with a bowl of tum-tum and pork, and, having shot it upon my lap, put mouth to mine ear with the shout: "Eat, Englishman! Thou art doomed for the ship!"

He then fell out, leaving me in a maze. But I think that I had not ended the meal when the meaning of his words was but little uncertain to me, who was versed in the manners of the sea, and of Spanish seamen in especial; and I said within myself "the *San Matteo* is now doubtless near her end; the sun hath gone out of the sky; the course peradventure lost: and I, the heretic, am condemned to be thrown away, as Jonah, to assuage the tempest."

The rest of that day, therefore, I lay upon my face, recommending my spirit, my wife, and my children to my Creator, until, toward night, three sailors came in, laid hands on me, and hauled me forth; and I was hardly hauled to the castle's portal, when my old samite coif leapt off my head, and was swept away.

Surely never mortal wretch had bleaker last look at the scheme of being than I that night. There remained some sort of disastrous glimmering in the air, but it was a glimmer

that was itself but a mood of gloom. A rust on the nigh horizon that was the sun was shining on high above the working of the billows, then hurling itself below, with an alternate circular working, as it were a dissolute or sea-sick thing. The skies were, as it were, tinted with inks, and appeared to be no higher beyond the sea than the mizzen-top, where sea and sky were mixed. I saw that the poop's mast was gone, and the *San Matteo* under two sails only, the mizzen-top sail and the sprit sail: yet with these she was careering in desperate wise like a capon in a scare from the face of the tempest, taking in water with an alternate process over her port and starboard wales, and whirled to her top-castles in sprays: so that she was as much within the sea as on it. Our trip from my prison to the poop's castle must have occupied, with his halts, no less than twenty minutes of time, so swung were our feet between deep and high: and in that time a multitude of sounds the most drear and forlorn seemed borne from out the bowels of the darkness to mine ears, as screams of craziness, a ding-dong of sea-bells, or cadences of sirens crying, or one sole toll of a funeral-knell. I was as one adream with awe: for I understood that into all that war of waters I was about to go down, alone.

Lashed to the starboard turret of the poop's castle by a cord within the ring at its paunch was a portugal, such as be employed to store pork on big voyages; and, sprawling on the deck, with his paws clutching within a window-sill of the turret, was the Jesuit, his robes all blown into disarray, with him being the ship's master, having a hammer's handle sticking out of his pouch, and four others, the particulars of whose persons mine eyes, as though I had scores of eyes that night, observed of their own act.

As I staggered near the lax keeping of my guardians, the portugal was cast aslant to his lashing, and I could then descry within it one of those 30-inch masses of iron ballast, such as be named dradoes; by the which I understood that I should not be tossed forth coffinless, as Jonah, but in the portugal: inasmuch as the corpse of many a Jonah hath been known to "chase I' the wake", as mariners relate, to the disaster of them in the ship; and the confining of such in ballasted casks has long been a plan of the Spanish in especial.

On my coming to the turret, he whom I took to be the master put hand upon me, uttering somewhat which the hurricane drowned in his mouth, though I guessed that he egged me to go into the portugal: and indeed I was speedily heeled up and hustled in. Resistance would have been but little difficult to me, had I willed, but could have resulted only in the rolling overboard of others with me: nor had I a spirit of resistance, nay, probably lost my consciousness upon entering, for nothing can I remember more, till the top was covered in, save only one segment of it, through which I on my face glimpsed three struggling shapes, and understood that the Jesuit, now upheld 'twixt two of the shipmen, was shouting over me some litany or committal. In the next moment I lay choked in blackness, and had in my consciousness a hammer's banging.

Whether awake or adream, I seemed to recognise the moment when the portugal's mass splashed the ocean; I was aware of the drado's bulk tumbling about the sides, and of a double bump of the iron, the one upon my breast, the other upon my right thigh.

Now, this was hardly owing to the water's roughness, for

my last glance abroad before going into the portugal had shewn me a singular condition of the sea: the ship appeared to have driven into a piece of water comparatively calm, and pallid, a basin perhaps half-a-mile in breadth, on a level rather below the rest of the ocean that darkly rolled round its edge; and the whole seemed to me to move with a slow wheeling: for I had noted it well, with that ten-eyed unwittingness wherewith I noted everything that night, as the mariners' apparel, or the four-square cap of the Jesuit crushed over his nose, or the porky stench of the portugal . . .

Down, swiftly down, and still profounder down, I ripped toward the foundry of things, to where the mountains and downs of the mid-sea drowse. I had soon lost all sense of motion: still, I divined—I knew—with what a swiftness I slid, profoundly drowned, mile on mile, and still down, from the home of life, and hope, and light, and time. I was standing on the drado, no less steadily than if on land, for the drado's weight held the portugal straight on end, the portugal's top being perhaps one inch above my head—for my hands touched it, paddling for some moments as though I was actually adrown, like the paddling pattes of a hound in his drowning. But I stood with no gasping for a good span, the portugal was so roomy; and it proved as good-made as roomy, though soon enough some ominous creakings gave me to know that the sea's weight was crushing upon his every square inch with a pressure of tons; moreover, both my palms being pressed forth against the portugal's side, all at once the right palm was pierced to the quick by some nail, driven inward by the squeezing of the sea's weight; and quickly thereupon I felt a drop of water fall upon my

top, and presently a drop, and a drop, bringing upon me a deliberate drip, drip: and I understood that the sea, having forced a crack, was oozing through atop.

No shock, no stir was there: yet all my heart was conscious of the hurry of my dropping from the world. I understood—I knew—when I had fared quite out of hue and shape, measure and relation, down among the dregs of creation, where no ray may roam, nor a hope grow up; and within my head were going on giddy divinations of my descent from depth to depth of deader nothingness, and dark after dark.

Groan could I not, nor sigh, nor cry to my God, but stood petrified by the greatness of my perishing, for I felt myself banished from His hand and the scope of His compassion, and ranging every moment to a more strange remoteness from the territories of His reign.

Yet, as my sense was toward whirling unto death, certain words were on a sudden with me, that for many a month, I think had never visited my head: for it was as if I was now aware of a chorus of sound quiring in some outermost remoteness of the heaven of heavens, whence the shout of ten thousand times ten thousand mouths reached to me as a dream of mine ear: and this was their shout and the passion of their chanting: "If I ascend up into Heaven, He is there; if I make my bed in Hell, behold, He is there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall His hand lead me, His right hand shall hold me."

But the lack of air, that in some minutes had become the main fact of my predicament, by this time was such, that I

had come to be nothing but a skull and throat crowded with blood that would bound from me, but could not; yet I think that in the very crux of my death-struggle a curiosity as to the grave, and the nature of death—a curiosity as frivolous as the frolics of a trickster—delayed my failing; for I seemed to desire to see myself die.

Still upon my top, with a quickening drip, drip, dropped the leak, and this in my extremest smart I ceased not to mark.

But there came a moment when all my sentience was swallowed in an amazing consciousness of motion. First I was urgently jerked against the portugal, the which was tugged sideways by some might: some moments more, and the portugal bumped upon something. By a happy instinct, I had stiffened myself, my feet on the drado, my head pressed against the top piece; and immediately I was aware of precipitous rage, haste the most rash, for a quick succession of shocks, upon rocks, as I imagine, quick as you may say one, two, three, knocked me breathless who was already breathless, racking the cask's frame, and battering me back, so to say, out of my death into sense. And or ever I could lend half a thought to this mystery of motion-on-the-horizontal down by the ocean's bottom, I was hounded on to a mystery still more astounding—a sound in the realm of muteness—a roar—that very soon grew to a most great tumult. During which growth of tumult I got the consciousness of being rushed through some tunnel, for the concussions of the cask on every side came fast and more frightfully faster; and I now made out, how I cannot tell, that the direction of my race was half horizontal, and half downward, toward the source of that sounding. How long the trip lasted my spirit,

spinning in that thundering dark, could hardly sum up: it might have been a minute or five, a mile or twenty: but there came a moment when I felt the portugal lifted up, and tossed; it was spinning through space; and it dropped upon rock with a crash which ravished me from my consciousness.

So intemperate was this mauling, that upon returning to myself after what may have been many hours, I had no doubt but that I was dead; and within myself I breathed the words: "The soul is an ear; and Eternity is a roar."

For I appeared at present to be a creature created with but one single sense, since, on placing my fingers an inch afore my face, in vain I strained my vision to trace them; my body, in so far as I was any longer cognizant thereof, was, as it were, lost to me, and blotted out; so that I seemed to be naught but an ear, formed to hear unceasingly that tumult that seemed the universe: and anew and anew I mused indolently within me: "well, the soul is an ear; and Eternity is a roar."

Thus many minutes I lay, histing with interest to the tone of the roar, the which hath with it a shell's echoing that calleth, making a chaunting vastly far in the void, like an angel's voice far noising. What proved to me that I was disembodied was the apparent fact that I was no longer in the portugal, since I at present breathed free; nevertheless, upon bcoming conscious in the course of time of a stench of sea-brine, and presently of the mingling therewith of the portugal's stink of pork, I straight-way felt myself to be living flesh; and, on reaching out my fingers, felt the sufficient reason of my breathing, to wit, that the portugal's bottom had been breached in, and a hoop there started by his fall,

for the staves' ends at that part at present spread all asprawl. I was prostrate upon my back, and the drado and broken portugal's bottom lay over my legs, so that the portugal must have toppled over on his side after striking on his end.

The next circumstance that I now observed was a trembling of the ground on which I lay, the which trembled greatly, as with a very grave ague.

I set myself then to talk with myself, recalling, not without an effort of my memory, the certain facts of my predicament: to wit, firstly, that I had been cast in a cask from a bark called the *San Matteo*, not less than a century ago, I thought; I had then beyond doubt gone down toward the bottom of the sea; here some sea-river had undoubtedly seized and reeled me through some tunnel beneath the sea's base: and the under-tow of this sea-river's suction it was which must have occasioned that basin-like appearance of the sea's surface with a circular working, observed by me some moments before my going in the portugal. This salt torrent, having caught my cask, must have hurtled me through the tunnel to a hollow hall or vault in the bowels of the earth at the tunnel's mouth, and had then hurled the portugal from the tunnel's mouth down upon some rock in the grotto, and so broken the portugal's bottom. The cave must contain the air which it had shut in in the age of the convulsion of nature which had made it a cave, peradventure ere the sea was there, thus permitting me to breathe. And the roar that was roaring should be the thundering of the ocean tumbling down the walls of the hall from out the tunnel's mouth, the preponderousness of which thundering's dropping down occasioned that ague of the ground which was shaking me.

So much I could well sum up; also, from that echo's humming, whose vast psalmodying haunts the waterfall's thunder, I judged that the hollowness of the hall must be large beyond thought. More than this I understood not; but, this being understood, I covered my face, and gave myself to lamenting: for, ever and again, together with the thunder and his echo, worked certain burstings and crashes of the cataract, brief belchings breaching on a sudden, troubling the echo with yet huger rumours, madding sad to hearken to; and my hand could I not descry, stared I never so crazily nigh; and the ague of the ground was, as it were, a shivering at the shout of God-omnipotent's mouth: so that sobs gobbled forth of my bosom, when I understood the pathos of this place.

On throwing my hands over my eyes to cry, I felt on them a slime crass with granules, perhaps splashed upon me through the open end of the portugal on his tumble, the which when I had brushed away, with much anguish I got my head round to where my feet had been. No doubt had I but I should of necessity perish of thirst and the dearth of food; but that I might come to my doom at liberty, I crept forth of my prison, as a chick from the rupture of his shell.

A tinder-box was in my pouch, but, in the swoond of my comprehension, I did not then remember it, but moved in darkness over a slime with my arms outstretched, drenched ever with a drizzle, the source of which I did not know. Slow I moved, for I discovered my right thigh to be crushed, and all my body much mauled; and, or ever I had moved ten steps, my shoe stepped into emptiness, and down with a shout I sped, spinning, to the depth.

My falling was stopped by a splash into a water that was

warm, into which I sank far; and I rose through it bearing up with me some putrid brute that drew the rheum of his mucus over my face. I then struck out to swim back to the island from whose cliff I had tumbled: for I saw that the cavern's bottom was occupied by a sea, or salt pond, and that upon some island in this sea the cask must have been cast. But my effort to get again to the island availed not, for a current which seized me carried me still quicker, increasing at the last to such a careering that I could no more keep me up over the waves; whereupon an abandonment of myself came upon me, and I began now to drown, yet ever grasping out, as the drowning do; and afore I swooned I was thrown against a shore, where, having clutched something like a gracile trunk, I dragged my frame up on a shore covered over with that same grainy slush, and tumbled to a slumber which dured, I dare say, two days.

I started awake with those waters in mine ear whose immortal harmony, I question it not, I will for ever hear in my heart; and I sat still, listing, afear'd to budge, lest I should afresh blunder into trouble, while mine eyeballs, bereft of light, braved the raylessness with their staring. My feet lay at a sea's edge, for I could feel the upwashing of the waves, the which wash obliquely upon the shore, being driven by a current: but near as they were, I could hear ne'er a splash, nor anything could hear, except the cataract's crashing, joined with the voice of his own echoing, whose music tuneth with the thundering a euphony like that of lute-strings with drum ahumming, and anon the racket of those added crashings, when masses more ponderous of the cataract drop; and I did ever find myself listing with mine ear reached sideward,

drawn to the darksome chaunting, forgetting my hunger, and the coming of death: listing I wot not how long, perhaps hours, perhaps night-longs: for here in this hall is no Time, but all is blotted out but the siren's sorrow that haunts it: and a hundred years is as one hour, and one hour as a hundred years.

I remarked, however, immediately, that the waves which washed my feet were not warm like that part of the water where I had fallen into the lake; so that I understood that the lake is a cauldron of different temperatures at different parts, the waters which roll in from the ocean being cold, but the lake warmed by flames beneath the cave: indeed, each region of the cave, so far as my feet ever reached in it, is always warm to the hand, and the atmosphere warm, though thick, and sick with stinks of the sea.

After a long while I found the tinder-box within my pouch, wherein also I found a chisel which I was bringing to my house to sharpen on the night of my capture, and also a small gar or gimlet. So I struck a flash that cut mine eyes like a gash, and I kindled a rag, the which glowed a rich gore-colour upon an agitated water rushing past the shore; and although only a small region of the dark was lit up, I could see sufficient of the shore's sweep to understand that I was standing on a mainland made of granite, but not altogether without marl on the ground, nigh behind me being a grove of well-formed growths resembling elms, all gnarled and venerable, yet no taller than my belly, although some do come to my neck. Their leaves be milk-white, and even of a quite round shape, and they do for ever shake themselves with the ground that shakes, and produce a globose fruit, the

which is blanched, too, and their boles pallid. I saw long afterwards another dwarf of just the same shape, only his fruit oozeth a juice like soap's water, that maketh a lather. On the lake also I have lately seen by the torch's light near the island a weed with leaves over two yards long, the which be caused to float on the water by small bladders attached to it; and also the marshy spot by the promontory is the forest of bulrushes, that show a tuft, or plume, at their summit, and they do shake themselves, their stem being about three feet high, and they shoot out a single root that groweth visible over the ground seven feet or more in his length, besides which, I observed none other shrubs, save a pale purple fungus, well-nigh white, growing on these rocks where I write, and in the corridor which is on this side of the pond of pitch.

But in that minute's glimmering, while my rag's light was dancing on the waves, I knew what super-abundance of food lay for me in this place, to be had by only putting forth of my hand: for in that paltry area of the water I saw pale creatures like snakes seven or eight feet long, tangled together in a knot, and some more alone, and four globose white beings, so that I could see that the lake is alive with life; and they lay there quite unaware of the light that pried on their whiteness, so that I decided that they be wights deprived of eyes. A very long time later on, probably many years, I came upon the stream to the lake's left, by the promontory, the which is thronged with oysters, with many sorts of pearl, and conch shells: but at the first I saw it not.

To have the creatures of the lake, I take stand to my knees in the water's margin (for farther I may not enter for the

strength of the current), lean forward with the torch, and abide the coming of the creature of my liking, the which resembles the creatures called a trunk-fish in the tropics, being of triangular form, with freckles. The species of the creatures of the lake be few, though their number great; and, as all the plants be very pigmy, so all the animals be of great bigness, save one thing resembling a lizard, a finger in his length, that I have seen on the reefs, and his tail is formed in the shape of a leaf, and engorgeth itself grossly, and it gazeth through great globose eyeballs that glare lidless, but they be blind eyeballs; and one only wight of the lake has eyes, but they do hang by a twine out of his eye-sockets, and dangle about his countenance, and be blind. As to their catching, this I managed at starting without so much as a torch, but by the touch alone; nor do their sluggish natures struggle against my grabbing, but by their motions I understand the wonder that they have what creature he might be who removeth them from their secret home. The flesh of one and all is soft and watery, yet cruel tough, and crude to the tongue. My repasts at starting were ate raw; but afterwards I made fires with the tree-trunks, the which being dry-timbered, I could chop down with the chisel and a rock for my hammer. Later on when I did find out the rock-hall, I laid my fire there: but almost all the rags of my garments, except my jerkin, had been burned up for tinder, before I unearthed the marsh of bulrushes, whose pith served me from thenceforth both for tinder and food, and at present also for parchment: for, boiled in the hot rivulet in the rock-hall, the pith and fish together giveth an excellent good food, when, being voided of moisture, and pounded, they be-

come a powder or flour; so that when I had once come at the bulrushes, where, too, are the oysters, being put upon the plan of boiling, I no more roasted my food as before.

For what appeared a long period, as it were long weeks, I mollified my thirst by soaking my body on the shore's verge, where the waves break; but thirst became a rage in my throat, like that lust of light in mine eyes, so that sometimes, pronouncing a shout, I did desperately drench my bowels, drinking my fill of the bitterness, the which, I am convinced, is more bitterer than the bitterness of the outer sea. By this time I had roamed exploring far around that part of the shore on which I was cast up, and had found about me a boundless house of caves, chambers, corridors, with dwarf forests, and stretches of sponges of stone, boulders, and tracts of basalt columns, a fantastic mass to me of rock and darkness, all racked, and like the aspen dancing, to the farthest point of my wandering, all inhabited by the noise of the waters' voice, and stinking of the sea with so raw a breath, that in several spots the nostrils scarce can bear it. There be shells of many shapes and dimensions upon the land, many enamelled with gems and pearl, sea-urchins also, star-fish, sea-cucumbers, and other sea-beasts with spines, mussels nigh to the promontory on the lake's left, corals, and many kinds of sponges, many monstrous huge and having a putrid stench, some, as it were, sponges of stones, others soft, and others of lucid glass, painted gallant with hues of the rainbow, and very gracious shaped, as hand-baskets, or ropes of glass, but crude of odour. Till I had set up my hearth in the rock-hall, I rambled about without any torch, for the cause that I knew not yet well the inflammable mood of the wood, nor had yet

tumbled upon the sulphur, nor the pitch, with which to lard the torches; and, walking dark, with just a flash anon, I did often count my footsteps, it might be to a thousand, or two, till tired out. But spite of my ramblings, my body had knobs like leprosy, and was lacerated with my scratching, and racked with the rushing through me of the salt draughts which I drank, afore ever I chanced upon fresh water. That day I descended by three great steps that are made as by men's hands, and that lie peradventure half a mile from the lake, into a basalt hall, vastly capacious, so that forty chariots could race abreast therein; and the walls be as straight as the walls of masons, the roof low, only some twenty foot aloft, flat and smooth and black, and at the remote end of it a forest of basalt columns stands. There I marked that the air was even warmer than the warm air near the lake, and it was not long ere I had advanced into a hot steaming, with a sulphur stench, the which I had no sooner perceived than I fell upon my hands over a heap which proved, when I had struck a flash, to be slushy sulphur. I also saw a canal cut through the floor across the rock-hall's breadth, as regular as if graved there, this being two feet deep, as I discovered, and two feet across, through which canal babbled a black brook, bubbling hot, the floor on each bank of the canal being heaped with sulphur. I had soon scooped up some of the fluid with the tinder-box, and upon his cooling somewhat, I discovered it to be fresh, though sulphurous, and also tarry, in his taste; and thenceforth I had it always cooling in rows of conch shells by the rock-hall's left wall.

And during all the years of my tarrying in this tomb, the rock-hall hath become, in some manner, my home. There, in

a corner nigh the three steps, I made up a fire; I put round it stones, and over the stones a slab, and plaiting my beard into my hair behind me, I there broiled my meat, until the time when I took to boiling the mixed trunk-fish and bulrush in the canal's boiling brook; and for a long while I kept the fire ever fed with wood from the tiny forests: for that I loved his light.

But, as to light, I have nineteen times beheld it in this dark from other causes than mine own fires, seventeen times the light being lightning: for lightning I must call it, the land lightning like the sky: and this I understand not at all. But I was standing by the water's margin, bent upon catching my white blindings, when the cavern became far and wide as it were an eye that wildly opened, winked five million to the minute, and as suddenly closed; and after a minute of thick darkness as afore, it opened once more, quick quivered, and closed. And there all ghastr I stayed, in my heart's heart the ghastr thought: "Thou, God, Seest Me." But though mine eyes staggered at the glare, I fancy that in fact it was but faint, and the ghost only of a glare, for of the cave's secrets little was thereby revealed unto me: and sixteen times in like wise his wings have quivered, and the wildness of his eye hath stared at me like the visitations of an archangel: and twice, besides, I have beheld the cave lighted by the volcano.

But it was long before ever the volcano came that I fell in with the mescal: for it was no long time after that surprise of lightning that, in pacing once to the shore to take up some trunk-fish which I had thrown in the slush there—I think eight or twelve years may then have gone over me—I hap-

pened to bruise in my fingers one of the pigmy globose fruit, and there oozed out of it a milk that I put to my lips. It was bitter, but I did swallow some drops unawares, the result whereof was wondrous: for even ere I reached the beach, an apathy enwrapped my being; I let myself drop down by the breakers' brim; my brow and body collapsed in a lassitude; and my lips let out the whisper: "pour on: but as for me, I will know rest". I was thereupon lapped in trances the most halcyon and happy; the roaring rolled for me into such oratorios as my mouth may not pronounce, though I appeared, so to speak, to *see*, more than to hear, that music; and in the mean time mine eyes, fast closed, had afore them a universe of hues in slow movement and communion, hues glowing, and hues ghostly and gnomelike, some of them new hues to me, so that I knew not at all how to call them, with cataracts of pomegranate grains pattering, waves of parrot green, wheels of raspberry reeling, dapplings of apple and pansy, pallid eyeballs of bile and daffodil, pellucid tulips, brooks of rubies, auroras, roses, all awork in a world earnestest than Earth, that it were empty to attempt to tell of.

I had heard tell at San Juan of the shrub which they do name "the mescal button", chewed by the Mexicans to produce upon them such revelations of hues; and I have concluded that this shrub of the cave must be of nature akin. But though the gift of it transfigured that stink-pit beneath the sea into a region of the genii for me, I was aware that to munch thereof was presumptuous, for the troubles that his rancour bringeth upon the body of men were quickly obvious upon me. But I made never an attempt to abandon his happiness, for it wheeleth through the brain to so sweet

a strain, and talketh such gossip to the organs of the consciousness, as I do not suppose to be true of the very lotus, nor of that pleasant root that is known as nepenthe.

I have spent years on years, nay, as it seems to me, eras on eras, in one dreaming by the sea's rim, while my soul, so to speak, passed into the cataract's inmost roar, and became as one therewith. I lay there naked, for at first I had preserved my jerkin and shirt to serve for tinder, until I tumbled upon the discovery of the bulrush-pith, whereupon I employed the jerkin and shirt to contain the pith and fish for their boiling; so after the last of my trouser's rags had shredded from around my legs, and my shoes, too, from my feet, through great periods of time I have lain there naked, though enveloped to my belly in my hair and beard, idly dreaming, finding it too dreary a trial to seethe my food, and often eating raw, having long ago let the fire in the rock-hall go out. In the end I have shirked even the burden of bending in the sea's surf, or of journeying to the mussel stream, to get at my grub, and will spend considerable periods with never a bit other drink or meat than that bitter-sweet milk of the mescal.

From this life of sloth twice only have I been disturbed by fright, the first time when the volcano came, the second time when I observed the increasing dearth of air to breathe; and on each occasion I was spurred to take torch and search further afield than e'er before what the vault holds—in both searches meeting with what turned out serviceable to my needs: for in the first search I butted on the bulrush bush, which I believe I butted on years ere I observed this increasing dearth of air; and it was the increasing dearth of air

which sent me peering further a second time, and then I saw the pond of pitch. This latter is beyond the forest of basalt columns at the far end of the rock-hall; and it was in passing to it through those columns that I saw the beast's bones, that be bigger, I believe, than several elephants together, although the beast resembles an elephant, having straight tusks, exceeding long; and his jaw hath six huge teeth, very strange, every several tooth being made of littler ones, the which cling about it like nipples; and there among those pillars his ribs may have rested for many a century, some of them being now brittle and embrowned; and beyond the pillars is a passage, perfectly curved, having a purplish fungus growing upon his rock; and beyond the passage is a cavern than whose threshold I could no farther advance, for the bed thereof is a bitumen sea, which is half-warm and thick at the brink, but, I think, liquid hot in the middle; and all over his face broods a universe of rainbows, dingy and fat, which be from the fat vapours of the pitch bringing forth rainbows, not rainbows of heaven, but, so to say, fallen angels, grown gross and sluggish. But years ere this, I think, I had seen the bulrushes: for, soon after the volcano came, in roaming over the left shore of the cataract's sea—the which left shore is flat and widespread, and hath no high walls like the right side—I walked upon a freset of fresh warm water, and after following it upward, saw all round a marsh's swamp, and the bush of bulrushes. This is where the oysters be so crass, and they be pearl oysters, for all that soil be crass with nacreous matter of every sort, with barrok pearls, mother-of-pearl, and in most of the oysters which I opened pearls, with a lot of conch shells that have within

them pink pearls, and there be also the black pearl, such as they have in Mexico and the West Indies, with the yellow and likewise the white, which last be shaped like the pear, and large, and his pallor hath a blank brightness, very priceless, and, so to say, bridal. As to the bulrush his trunk is triangular (like the trunk-fish), some five inches wide at the bottom, and giveth a white pith good for food. I came, moreover, upon the discovery after a long time that, since this pith lieth in layers, these, being steeped in water, and afterwards dried, do shrink to a parchment, quite white and soft, but tending to be yellow and brittle in time.

But for these two adventures, first to the bulrushes, and then to the pond or sea of pitch, I cannot remember that that long trance I had by the shore was broken by any excursion. But I had a rough enough rousing in that hour when, upon opening mine eyes, I beheld, not the old darkness, but all the hall disclosed in scarlet, and felt the cavern in movement, not with that proper trembling that I knew, due to the preponderousness of the cataract's mass over the earth's fabric, but racked with an earthquake's racking: and when mine eyes, now shyer than the night-bird's, recovered their courage, I observed the sea's whole surface heaved up like sand-heaps, dandled up with the earthquake's dancing. Now also for the first time I saw aloft to my right the tunnel's monstrous mouth, out of which the cataract's mass tumbleth down, the mouth's top rim being rounded, like the top lip of a man's mouth crying aloud. I saw also the cataract rolling hoary across his whole breast's breadth, woolly with flocks and beards of froth, as it were Moses' beard, except at the centre, where it gallops glassy smooth and more massy, for there

the sea cometh out from the tunnel's inwards to stretch itself out in that mouth that shouteth aloud. I saw also the roof like a rufous sky of rock, and right before mine eyes lay an island, long and narrow, upon the which I had been cast at the first, for there yet lay the portugal on the right end of the island, that right end lying quite nigh the cataract, and the island's left end some twenty yards from the lake's left end. And I saw the lake in his entirety by spying over the island's centre, where the land lies low, the lake having an egg's form, perhaps two miles in his length, I being at the egg's small end. I saw also that the cave's right side, where the wall rises sheer, is washed directly by the lake's wheeling career; and since the cataract there crashes down, along that right side I cannot advance; nor along the cave's left side can I advance so much as a mile, for there a headland juts out into the lake, dividing that side of the cave into two great rooms. I saw also nigh the far shore of the lake four more small islands of rock, and I was shewn, from the lake's ocean-like aspect, that his waters be vastly profound, his bottom being doubtless housed far down in the planet's bowels. All was lit up, and some distance beyond the lake's far boundaries I saw the mouth of some cave, through which came up a haze of radiance sparkling, and vaulting stones, and therewith some tongues of flame, which now showed, and now withdrew their rouge.

I gathered that some volcanic action was going on under the cavern, and as I there stayed, agape at it, I saw arise out of the lake in the remote distance, and come toward me, a thing, with the which I so long had lived, and known it not. His body lay soft in curves on the billows nigh a furlong

behind his uplifted head, and I could not fly, nor turn mine eyes from the pitifulness of his appearing in the light. His head and face be of the dimension of a cottage, having a shameful likeness to a death's-head, being bony, skinny, and very tight-skinned, and of a mucky white colour, with freckles. It hath a forehead and nose-ridge, but, where eyes should be, stands blank skin only; and it drew nigh me with the toothless house of his mouth wide open in a scream of fear, distrusting Him that made it: for the air was waxing still hotter, and it may have had an instinct of calamity, peradventure from some experience of the volcano's fierceness a century since. It travelled nigh under the island's right end through the cataract's foam, and then close under me, nor could see me look at his discovered nudity, nor could my rooted foot flee from it; and on it journeyed, circling the lake's surface with the dirge of his lamentation. Immediately after I lost my reason through the fierceness of the heat, and reeled; and when I came back to myself the cave was as black as ever. And once again, long afterwards, I saw flames flutter in the cave beyond the lake, a grey dust rained over the lake's face, the great creature arose, and a grove of the trees at this end were seared with heat; but since then the event has never been seen.

But it was soon subsequent to this second convulsion that I made an observation: to wit, that unless I was well under the rule of the mescal fruit—when I do scarce seem to breathe—I became aware of an oppression of the chest. And this grew with me; so that I began to commune within me, saying: "Though the cavern be vast, the air that it containeth must be of limited volume, and I have inhaled it long: for

whereas when I hither came I was a young thing, I am now old. My lungs have day by day consumed the wholesome air; and the day approacheth when I must surely perish."

At the commencement it was only when I lay me to rest that the trouble oppressed me, but, sat I up, it passed; then after, if I sat, it oppressed me; but, stood I up, it passed: so that I understood it to be so that a lake of noxious vapour lay at the bottom of the air of this place, a lake due to my breathing, that each year grew in depth and noxiousness, the longer I breathed: this vapour having a sleepy effect, not happy like the mescal's, but highly unhappy, making me nightmares and aches of my body. In the beginning I got relief by going to live in other regions than in the rock-hall and on the beach: but in every direction my way hath now been blocked, for I have now inhabited in turn every cranny of the cavern whereto I am able to penetrate, and the vapour is in all, troubling also the shrubs of all sorts, the which let fall their heads, and shed their health. There remain some coigns among the rockeries, wherein, when I toil aloft to them, I may yet breathe with some freedom; but that my days are numbered I know. My God! my God! why hast Thou created me?

But soon after understanding the manner of my undoing, I began to argue in myself as regards the cavern and his architecture as never formerly, arguing that whereas so great volumes of water came in, and the vault was not filled, there must needs be some outlet for an equal volume to flow out. I was led to conjecture that the tunnel which admits the sea into the cavern is at some sea-mountain's summit; that the cavern must be in the mountain's bowels; and that the out-

flow out of the cavern must be down another much longer tunnel, leading down to the mountain's bottom into the sea. I therefore conceived the notion that, if I could reach the portugal, get it repaired, and, in it, introduce myself into the tunnel of outflow (the which I knew to be beyond the headland on the lake's left, where the lake's two wheeling currents meet), then I should be carried down and out into the bottom of the sea, should thereupon rise to the sea's surface—for the unweighted portugal would certainly float with me—and there I might bore a hole or two in the portugal's upper belly for air, and be picked up by a ship before my stores were done, and before my death from hunger or suffocation, I being well drugged with the mescal, and so but little breathing or eating. As to introducing myself into the tunnel of outflow, nothing more was necessary than to get the portugal to the headland's end, get myself into it, and roll myself in the portugal from the headland's end into the lake: where the currents would not fail to bear me toward the place of outflow, and I should be sucked down into the tunnel.

I meditated that the stupendousness of the attempt in no fashion lessened my chance: for that laws will act exactly on the immense scale as on the small. The portugal I could get to by going into the lake at the egg's-point of the lake, whence the current would carry me away along the left shore toward the inland, the left end whereof I might catch by continually swimming strong to the right; and lest I should be dashed to fragments in my grand journey through the tunnel, I determined to pad the portugal's inside with the bulrush pith; and moreover I devised a sliding-door in the

portugal's side, the which when I should reach the sea's surface would be furnishing me with breathing: in the making whereof I did not doubt but that my former craft in carpentry would help me out. That I might be struck blind by the moon's brightness, and surely by the sun's, upon opening mine eyes up there above I reflected: but I price eyes as of but paltry value to a man, and should estimate it no hardship to dispense with mine, such as they are. On the whole, I had no fear; and the reason of my fearlessness, as I at present perceive, lay in this: that in my heart I never at all intended to attempt the venture. It was a fond thought: for, granting that I got out, how could I live without the cataract? I should surely die. And what good were life to me there in the glare of day, without the mescal's joys, and without the secret presence of the voice, and the thing which it secretly shouteth? In such separation from the power of my life I should pass frailly away as a spectre at day-break: for by the power of the voice is my frail life sustained, and thereon I hang, and therein I have my being. And this in my soul I must have known: but in the futile mood that possessed me, I made three several attempts to gain the portugal, terrified the while at mine own temerity; and twice I failed to make the left end of the island, for the current carried me beyond—toward the tunnel of outflow, I doubted not; yet were my terrors not of that horror mainly, but of the monster in the lake's depth, the which stayeth there pale and pensive, meditating his meditations: for I knew that if my foot or hand just touched his skin, I must assuredly reel and sink, shrieking mad, since I swam dark, but having an unlighted torch in my hand, the tinder-box being tied within my beard; and the

first twice I was hurled to land upon the headland, but the third time upon the island's left end, and the rock of which I clambered up with my hands lacerated by shells. And after lighting the torch, I wrought my steps toward the island's right end; and there lay the portugal even as I had left it twenty, forty, years ago, the slime on his side yet wet from the water-fall's aura that haunts the island. And in that spot I saw, not the portugal alone, but moreover a sword's hilt, a human skull, and a clock's racket, thither tossed by the cataract. The portugal was still good, for the pitch which is on it: and having cast out the drado by an effort of all my strength, I struck out four of the nails from the three bottom pieces that had been sprung, nailed the three pieces, and the broken hoop of wood, too, to the side of the portugal, and so consigned the portugal to the waters, the which, I was assured, would bear it to the small end of the lake's egg-shape, as they had borne me upon mine ancient fall from the island.

But I had myself no sooner been spued again upon the mainland, more dead than alive, and there found the portugal stranded, then I knew myself for a futile dreamer, wearying myself without sincere motive: for that I should really abandon the cavern was a thing not within the capability of nature. And there by the shore's edge I left the portugal lying a good while, abiding for the most part upon the crags of these rocks that be like gradients on the right side of the hall, until that day when it was suggested to my spirit how strangely had been given me both ink and paper in this place, the knowledge moreover how to get the portugal forth of the grot with a history of that thing which my

God in song hath murmured unto me, having furtively hid me with His hand, though a seraph's pen could never express it; nor could I long resist the pressure of that suggestion to write, and send forth the writing in the portugal.

For the portugal's mending I had the gimlet, the chisel, mescal-timber, and some of the nails from the sprung bottom, which could be spared; nor was the job hard, since the one started hoop could be nicely spliced. I rolled and got the portugal up to this level ground in the rocks, surrounding myself, as I wrought, with tarred torches, which I stuck in the rocks' cracks: for down below it is reluctantly if a fire will now burn; and at this height also the torches do burn with shy fires.

Or ever the portugal was repaired, I had got ready the pages for writing, having divided fifteen of the bultush piths into strips, then wetted, and dried them; but there be spongy spots in them where the lampblack that I have manufactured out of the pitch runneth rather abroad under the spling of fish-bone that serves for my pen, hurting the fairness of my writing. That I could write at all I rather doubted, on the count that I have not for so long handled pen nor spoken, and on the count moreover of the trembling: for not only the pen trembleth by reason of mine age, but the parchment trembleth by reason of the vault's trembling; and between these two tremblements, in a sick sheen which flickers ever, these sheets have, letter by letter, been writ. The fifteen sheets of pith, moreover, have proved too little, and I am writing now on the second of two sheets that are sections of a fish's skin.

But now it is finished: and I send it out, if so be a fellow

in the regions above may read it, and know. My name, if I have not yet writ it down, was James Dowdy Saul; and I was born not far from the borough of Bideford in the county of Devon.

My God! My God! why hast Thou created me?

I ask it: for the question ariseth of itself to my mind because of the crass facts of my predicament; yet my heart knoweth it, Lord God, to be the grumble of an ingrate: for a hidden thing is, that is winninger than wife, or child, or the shining of any light, and is like unto treasure hid in a field, the which when a man findeth, he selleth all, and buyeth that field; and I thank, I do thank Thee, for Thy voice, and for my lot, and that it was Thy will to ravish me: for the charm of Thy secret is more than the rose, exceeding utterance.

The House of Sounds

"E caddi come l'uom cui sonno piglia."—Dante.

A good many years ago, when a young man, a student in Paris, I knew the great Carot, and witnessed by his side many of those cases of mind-malady, in the analysis of which he was such a master. I remember one little maid of the Marais who, until the age of nine, did not differ from her playmates; but one night, lying abed she whispered into her mother's ear: "Mama, can you not hear *the sound of the world?*" It appears that her geography had just taught her that our globe reels with an enormous velocity on an orbit about the sun; and this *sound of the world* of hers was merely a murmur in the ear, heard in the silence of night. Within six months she was as mad as a March-hare.

I mentioned the case to my friend, Haco Harfager, then occupying with me an old mansion in St. Germain, shut in by a wall and jungle of shrubbery. He listened with singular interest, and during a good while sat wrapped in gloom.

Another case which I gave made a great impression upon my friend: A young man, a toy-maker of St. Antoine, suffering from consumption—but sober, industrious—returning one gloaming to his garret, happened to purchase one of

those factious journals which circulate by lamplight over the Boulevards. This simple act was the beginning of his doom. He had never been a reader: knew little of the reel and turmoil of the world. But the next night he purchased another journal. Soon he acquired a knowledge of politics, the huge movements, the tumult of life. And this interest grew absorbing. Till late into the night, every night, he lay poring over the roar of action, the printed passion. He would awake sick, but brisk in spirit—and bought a morning paper. And the more his teeth gnashed, the less they ate. He grew negligent, irregular at work, turning on his bed through the day. Rags overtook him. As the grand interest grew upon his frail soul so every lesser interest failed in him. There came a day when he no more cared for his own life; and another day when he tore the hairs from his head.

As to this man the great Carot said to me:

"Really, one does not know whether to chuckle or to weep over such a business. Observe, for one thing, how diversely men are made! There are minds precisely so sensitive as a thread of melted lead: *every* breath will fret and trouble them: and how about the hurricane? For such this scheme of things is clearly no fit habitation, but a Machine of Death, a baleful Immense. *Too* cruel to some is the rushing shriek of Being—they *cannot* stand the world. Let each look well to his own little shred of existence, I say, and leave the monstrous Automaton alone! Here in this poor toy-maker you have a case of the ear: it is only the neurosis, Oxyecoaia. Grand was that Greek myth of 'the Harpies'—by *them* was this creature snatched away—or say, caught by a limb in the wheels of the universe, and so perished. It is quite a ravishing

exit—translation in a chariot of flame! Only remember that the member first seized was *the pinna* he bent *ear* to the howl of the world, and ended by himself howling. Between chaos and our shoes swings, I assure you, the thinnest film! I knew a man who had this aural peculiarity: that every sound brought him some knowledge of the matter causing the sound: a rod for instance, of mixed copper and tin striking upon a rod of mixed iron and lead, conveyed to him not merely the proportion of each metal in each rod, but some knowledge of the essential meaning and spirit, as it were, of copper, of tin, of iron and of lead. Him also did the Harpies snatch aloft!"

I have mentioned that I related some of these cases to my friend, Harfager: and I was astonished at the obvious pains which he gave himself to hide his interest, his gaping nostrils. . . .

From first days when we happened to attend the same seminary in Stockholm an intimacy had sprung up between us. But it was not an intimacy accompanied by the ordinary signs of friendship. Harfager was the shyest, most isolated, of beings. Though our joint housekeeping (brought about by a chance meeting at a midnight *séance*) had now lasted some months, I knew nothing of his plans. Through the day we read together, he rapt back into the past, I engrossed with the present; late at night we reclined on sofas within the vast cave of a hearth-place *Louis Onze*, and smoked over the dying fire in silence. Occasionally a *soirée* or lecture might draw me from the house; except once, I never understood that Harfager left it. On that occasion I was hurrying through the Rue St. Honoré, where a rush of traffic rattles over the

old pavers retained there, when I came upon him. In this tumult he stood in a listening attitude; and for a moment did not know me.

Even as a boy I had seen in my friend the genuine patrician—not that his personality gave any impression of loftiness or opulence: on the contrary. He did, however, suggest an incalculable *ancientness*; and I have known no nobleman who so bore in his expression the assurance of the essential Prince, whose pale blossom is of yesterday, and will perish tomorrow, but whose root shoots through the ages. This much I knew of Harfager; also that on one or other of his islands north of Zetland lived his mother and an aunt; that he was somewhat deaf; but liable to a thousand torments or delights at certain sounds, the whine of a door, the note of a bird. . . .

He was somewhat under the middle height; and inclined to portliness. His nose rose highly aquiline from that sort of brow called "the musical"—that is, with temples which incline *outward* to the cheek-bones, making breadth for the base of the brain; while the direction of the heavy-lidded eyes and of the eyebrows was a downward *droop* from the nose of their outer ends. He wore a thin chin-beard. But the feature of his face were the ears, which were nearly circular, very small and flat, without that outer curve called "the helix." I came to understand that this had long been a trait of his race. Over the whole wan face of my friend was engraved an air of woeful inability, utter gravity of sorrow: one said "Sardanapalus," frail last of the race of Nimrod.

After a year I found it necessary to mention to Harfager my intention of leaving Paris, as we reclined one night in

our nooks within the fireplace. He replied to my tidings with a polite "Indeed!" and continued to gloat over the grate: but after an hour turned to me and observed: "Well, it seems to be a hard world."

Truisms uttered in just such a tone of discovery I occasionally heard from him; but his earnest gaze, his despondency now, astonished me.

"Apropos of what?" I asked.

"My friend, do not leave me!" He spread his arms.

I learned that he was the object of a devilish malice; that he was the prey of a horrible temptation. That a lure, a becking hand, a lurking lust, which it was the effort of his life to escape (and to which he was especially liable in solitude) perpetually enticed him; and that so it had been almost from the day when, at the age of five, he had been sent by his father from his desolate home in the ocean.

And whose was this malice?

He told me his mother's and aunt's.

And what was this temptation?

He said it was the temptation to go back—to hurry with the very frenzy of hunger—back to that home.

I demanded with what motives, and in what way, the malice of his mother and aunt manifested itself. He answered that there was, he fancied, no definite motive, but only a fated malevolence; and that the respect in which it manifested itself was the prayers and commands with which they plagued him to go again to the hold of his ancestors.

All this I could not understand, and said so. In what consisted this magnetism, and this peril, of his home? To this Harfager did not reply, but rising from his seat, dis-

appeared behind the hearth-curtains, and left the apartment. When he returned, it was with a quarto tome bound in hide, which proved to be Hugh Gascoigne's *Chronicle of Norse Families* in English black-letter. The passage to which he pointed I read as follows:

"Now of these two brothers the older, Harold, being of seemly personage and prowess, did go a pilgrimage into Danemark, wherefrom he repaired again home to Hjaltland (Zetland), and with him fetched the amiable Thronda for his wife, who was a daughter of the sank (blood) royal of Danemark. And his younger brother, Sweyn, that was sad and debonair, but far surpassed the other in cunning, received him with all good cheer.

"But eftsoons (soon after) fell Sweyn sick for all his love that he had of Thronda, his brother's wife. And while the worthy Harold ministered about the bed where Sweyn lay sick, lo, Sweyn fastened on him a violent stroke with a sword, and with no longer tarrying enclosed his hands in bonds, and cast him in the bottom of a deep hold. And because Harold would not deprive himself of the governance of Thronda his wife, Sweyn cut off both his ear(s), and put out one of his eyes, and after divers such torments was ready to slay him. But on a day the valiant Harold, breaking his bonds, and embracing his adversary, did by the sleight of wrestling overthrow him, and escaped. Notwithstanding, he faltered when he came to the Somburg Head, not far from the Castle, and, albeit that he was swift-foot, could no farther run, by reason that he was faint with the long plagues of his brother. And whilst he there lay in a swoon, did Sweyn come upon him, and when he had stricken him with a dart, cast him from Somburg Head into the sea.

"Not long hereafterward did the lady Thronda (though she knew not the manner of her lord's death, nor, verily, if he was dead or alive) receive Sweyn into favour, and with great gaudying and blowing of beamous (trumpets) did become his wife. And right soon they two went thence to sojourn in far parts.

"Now, it befell that Sweyn was minded by a dream to have built a great mansion in Hjaltland for the home-coming of the lady Thronda; wherefore he called to him a cunning Master-workman, and sent him to England to gather men for the building of this lusty House, while he himself remained with his lady at Rome. Then came this Architect to London, but passing thence to Hjaltland was drowned, he and his feers (mates), all and some.

"And after two years, which was the time assigned, Sweyn Harfager sent a letter to Hjaltland to understand how his great House did: for he knew not of the drowning of the Architect: and soon after he received answer that the House *did well*, and was building on the Isle of Rayba. But that was not the Isle where Sweyn had appointed the building to be: and he was afeard, and near fell down dead for dread, because, in the letter, he saw before him the manner of writing of his brother Harold. And he said in this form: 'Surely Harold is alive, else be this letter writ with ghostly hand.' And he was wo many days, seeing that this was a deadly stroke.

"Thereafter he took himself back to Hjaltland to know how the matter was, and there the old Castle on Somburg Head was break down to the earth. Then Sweyn was wode-wroth, and cried: 'Jhesu mercy, where is all the great house of my fathers gone? alas! this wicked day of destiny!' And

one of the people told him that a host of workmen from far parts had break it down. And he said: 'Who hath bid them?' but that could none answer. Then he said again: 'nis (is not) my brother Harold alive? for I have behold his writing': and that, too, could none answer. So he went to Rayba, and saw there a great House stand, and when he looked on it, he said: 'This, sooth, was y-built by my brother Harold, be he dead or be he on-live.' And there he dwelt, and his lady, and his sons' sons until now: for that the House is ruthless and without pity; wherefore 'tis said that upon all who dwell there falleth a wicked madness and a lecherous anguish; and that by way of the ears do they drinck the cup of the furie of the earless Harold, till the time of the House be ended."

After I had read the narrative half-aloud, I smiled, saying: "This, Harfager, is very tolerable romance on the part of the good Gascoigne, but has the look of indifferent history."

"It is, nevertheless, *history*," he replied.

"You believe that?"

"The house stands solidly on Rayba."

"But you believe that mediaeval ghosts superintended the building of their family mansions?"

"Gascoigne nowhere says that," he answered: "for to be 'stricken with a darte,' is not necessarily to die; nor, if he did say it, have I any knowledge on the subject."

"And what, Harfager, is the nature of that 'wicked madness,' that 'lecherous anguish,' of which Gascoigne speaks?"

"Do you ask me?"—he spread his arms—"what do I know? I know nothing! I was banished from the place at the age of five. Yet the cry of it still rings in my mind. And

have I not *told* you of anguishes—even in myself—of inherited longing and loathing. . . .”

Anyway, I *had* to go to Heidelberg just then: so I said I would compromise by making my absence short, and rejoin him in a few weeks. I took his moody silence to mean assent; and soon afterwards left him.

But I was detained: and when I got back to our old house found it empty. Harfager was gone.

It was only after twelve years that a letter was forwarded me—a rather wild letter, an awfully long one—in the writing of my friend. It was dated at Rayba. From the writing I understood that it had been dashed off *with furious haste*, so that I was the more astonished at the very trivial nature of the contents. On the first half page he spoke of our old friendship, and asked if I would see his mother, who was dying; the rest of the epistle consisted of an analysis of his mother's family-tree, the apparent aim being to show that she was a genuine Harfager, and a distant cousin of his father. He then went on to comment on the great prolificness of his race, stating that since the fourteenth century over *four millions* of its members had lived; three only of them, he believed, being now left. This settled, the letter ended.

Influenced by this, I travelled northward; reached Caithness; passed the stormy Orkneys; reached Lerwick; and from Unst, the most bleak and northerly of the Zetlands, contrived, by dint of bribes, to pit the weather-worthiness of a lug-sailed “sixern” (identical with the “langsships” of the Vikings) against a flowing sea and an ugly sky. The trip, I was told, was at such a season of some risk. It was the sombre December of those seas; and the weather, they said, although

never cold, is seldom other than tempestuous. A mist now lay over the billows, enclosing our boat in a dome of doleful gloaming; and there was a ghostly something in the look of the silent sea and brooding sky which produced upon my nerves the mood of a journey out of nature, a cruise beyond the world. Occasionally, however, we ran past one of those "skerries," or sea-stacks, whose craggy sea-walls, disintegrated by the struggles of the Gulf Stream with the North Sea, had a look of awful ruin and havoc. But I only noticed three of these: for before the dun day had well run half its course, sudden darkness was upon us; and with it one of those storms of which the winter of this semi-Arctic sea is one succession. During the haggard glimpses of the following day the rain did not stop; but before darkness had quite fallen, my skipper (who talked continuously to a mate of seal-maidens, and water-horses, and *grülies*), paused to point me out a mound of gloomier grey on the weather-bow, which, he said, should be Rayba.

Rayba, he said, was the centre of quite a nest of those *rösts* (eddies) and cross-currents which the tidal wave hurls with complicated swirlings among all the islands: but at Rayba they ran with more than usual angriness, owing to the row of sea-craggs which garrisoned the land around; approach was therefore at all times difficult, and at night foolhardy. With a running sea, however, we came sufficiently close to see the mane of foam which railed round the coast-wall. Its shock, according to the captain, had often more than all the efficiency of artillery, tossing tons of rock to heights of six hundred feet upon the island.

When the sun next pried above the horizon, we had

closely approached the coast; and it was then that for the first time the impression of some spinning motion of the island (due probably to the swirling movements of the water) was produced upon me. We effected a landing at a *voe*, or sea-arm, on the west coast—the east, though the point of my aim, was out of the question on account of the swell. Here I found in two *skeoes* (or sheds), thatched with feal, five or six seamen, who gained a livelihood by trading for the groceries of the great house on the east: and, taking one of them for a guide, I began the climb of the island.

Now, during the night in the boat, I had been aware of a booming in the ears for which even the roar of the sea round the coast seemed insufficient to account; and this now, as we went on, became immensely augmented—and with it, once more, that conviction within me of *spinning* motions. Rayba I found to be a land of precipices of granite and flaggy gneiss; at about the centre, however, we came upon a table-land, sloping from west to east, and covered by a lot of lochs, which sullenly flowed into one another. I could see no shore eastward to this chain of waters, and by dint of shouting to my leader, and bending ear to his shoutings, I came to know that there *was* no such shore—I say *shout*, for nothing less could have sounded through the steady bellowing as of ten thousand bisons that now resounded on every side. A certain trembling, too, of the earth became distinct. In vain, meantime, did the eye in its dreary survey seek a tree or shrub—for no kind of vegetation, save peat, could brave for a day the perennial tempest of this benighted island. Darkness, half an hour after noon, commenced to fall upon us: and it was soon afterwards that my guide, pointing down a defile

near the east coast, hurriedly started back upon the way he had come. I bawled a question after him, as he went: but at this point the voice of mortals had ceased to be in the least audible.

Down this defile, with a sinking of the heart, and a singular sickness of giddiness, I passed; and, on reaching its end, emerged upon a ledge of rock which shuddered to the immediate onsets of the sea—though all this part of the island was, besides, in the grip of an ague not due to the great guns of the sea. Hugging a crag of cliff for steadiness from the gusts, I gazed forth upon a scene not less eerily dismal than some drear district of the dreams of Dante. Three “skerries,” flanked by stacks as fantastic and twisted as a witch’s finger, and giving a home to hosts of osprey and scart, seal and walrus, lay at some fathoms distance; and from its rush among them, the sea in blanched, tumultuous, but inaudible wrath, like an army with banners, ranted toward the land. Letting go my crag, I staggered some distance to the left: and now all at once an amphitheatre opened before me, and there broke upon my view a panorama of such appalling majesty as had never entered my heart to fancy.

“An amphitheatre,” I said: but it was rather the form of a Norman door that I saw. Fancy such a door, half a mile wide, flat on the ground, the rounded part farthest from the sea; and all round it let a wall of rock tower perpendicular forty yards: and now down this rounded door-shape, and *over its whole extent*, let a roaring ocean roll its tonnage in hoary fury—and the stupor with which I looked, and then the shrinking, and then the instinct of flight, will find comprehension.

This was the disemboisement of the lochs of Rayba.

And within the curve of this Norman cataract, robed in the world of its smokes and far-excursive surfs, stood a fabric of brass.

The last beam of the day had now nearly passed; but I could still see through the mist which bleakly nimbused it as in tears, that the building was low in proportion to the hugeness of its circumference; that it was roofed with a dome; and that round it ran two rows of Norman windows, the upper smaller than the lower. Certain indications led me to infer that the house had been founded upon a bed of rock which lay, circular and detached, within the curve of the cataract; but this nowhere emerged above the flood: for the whole floor which I had before me dashed one reeking deep river to the beachless sea—passage to the mansion being made possible by a massive causeway-bridge, with arches, all bearded with sea-weed.

Descending from my ledge, I passed along it, now drenched in spray; and, as I came nearer, could see that the house, too, was to half its height more thickly bearded than an old hull with barnacles and every variety of bright seaweed; also—what was very surprising—that from many spots near the top of the brazen wall ponderous chains, dropping beards, reached out in rays: so that the fabric had the aspect of a many-anchored ark. But without pausing to look closely, I pushed forward, and rushing through the smooth waterfall which poured all round from the roof, by one of its many porches I entered the dwelling.

Darkness now was around me—and sound. I seemed to stand in the centre of some yelling planet, the row resem-

bling the resounding of many thousands of cannon, punctuated by strange crashing and breaking uproars. And a sadness descended on me; I was near to tears. "Here," I said, "is the place of weeping; not elsewhere is the vale of sighing." However, I passed forward through a succession of halls, and was wondering where to go next, when a hideous figure, with a lamp in his hand, stamped towards me. I shrank from him! It seemed the skeleton of a lank man wrapped in a winding-sheet, till the light of one tiny eye, and a film of skin over a portion of the face reassured one. Of ears he showed no sign. His name, I afterwards learned, was Aith; and his appearance was explained by his pretence (true or false), that he had once suffered *burning*, almost to the cinder-stage, but had somehow recovered. With an expression of malice, and agitated gestures, he led the way to a chamber on the upper stage, where, having struck light to a taper, he made signs toward a spread table, and left me.

For a long time I sat in solitude, conscious of the shaking of the mansion, though every sense was swallowed up and confounded in the one impression of sound. Water, water, was the world—a nightmare on my breast, a desire to gasp for breath, a tingling on my nerves, a sense of being infinitely drowned and buried in boundless deluges; and when the feeling of giddiness, too, increased, I sprang up and paced—but suddenly stopped, angry, I scarce knew why, with myself. I had, in fact, caught myself walking with a certain *hurry*, not usual with me, not natural to me. So I forced myself to stand and take note of the hall. It was large, and damp with mists, so that its tattered, but rich, furniture looked lost in it, its centre occupied by a tomb bearing the name of a Harfager of the fourteenth century, and its walls old panels of oak.

Having drearily seen these things, I waited on with an intolerable consciousness of solitude; but a little after midnight the tapestry parted, and Harfager with a rapid stalk walked in.

In twelve years my friend had grown old. He showed, it is true, a tendency to portliness: yet, to a knowing eye he was in reality tabid, ill-nourished. And his neck stuck forward from his chest; and the lower part of his back had quite a forward bend of age; and his hair floated about his face and shoulders in a wildness of awful whiteness, while a white chin-beard hung to his chest. His dress was a robe of bauge, which, as he went, waved aflaunt from his bare and hairy shins; and he was shod in those soft slippers called *rivlins*.

To my astonishment, he spoke. When I passionately shouted that I could gather no fragment of sound from his moving mouth, he clapped both his palms to his ears, and then anew besieged mine: but again without result: and now, with an angry throw of the hand, he caught up his taper, and walked from the apartment.

There was something strikingly unnatural in his manner—something which reminded me of the skeleton, Aith: an excess of zeal, a fever, a rage, a *loudness*, an eagerness of gait, a great extravagance of gesture. His hand constantly dashed wiffs of hair from a face which, though of the saffron of death, had red eyes—thick-lidded eyes, fixed in a downward and sideward gaze. When he came back to me, it was with a leaf of ivory, and a piece of graphite, hanging from the cord tied round his garment; and he rapidly wrote a petition that, if not too tired, I would take part with him in the funeral of his mother.

I shouted assent.

Once more he clapped his palms to his ears; then wrote: "Do not shout: no whisper in any part of the building is inaudible to me."

I remembered that in early life he had been slightly *deaf*.

We passed together through many apartments, he shading the taper with his hand—a necessary action, for, as I quickly discovered, in no nook of the quivering building was the air in a state of rest, but was for ever commoved by a curious agitation, a faint windiness, like an echo of tempests, which communicated a universal nervousness to the curtains. Everywhere I met the same past grandeur, present raggedness and decay. In many of the rooms were tombs; one was a museum thronged with bronzes, but broken, grown with fungoids, dripping with moisture—it was as if the mansion, in ardour of travail, sweated; and a miasma of decomposition tainted all the air.

I followed Harfager through the maze of his way with some difficulty, for he went headlong—only once stopping, when with a face ungainly wild over the glare of the light, he tossed up his fingers, and gave out a single word: from the form of his lips I guessed the word "*Hark!*"

Presently we entered a very long chamber, in which, on chairs beside a bed, lay a coffin flanked by a file of candles. The coffin was very deep, and had this singularity—that the foot-piece was absent, so that the soles of the corpse could be seen as we approached. I saw, too, three upright rods secured to a side of the coffin, each rod fitted at its top with a little silver bell of the sort called *morrice*, pendent from a flexible spring. And at the head of the bed, Aith, with an air of irascibility, was stamping to and fro within a narrow area.

Harfager deposited the taper upon a stone table, and stood poring with a crazy intentness over the body. I, too, stood and looked at death so grim and rigorous as I think I never saw. The coffin looked angrily full of tangled grey locks, the lady being of great age, bony and hook-nosed; and her face shook with solemn constancy to the quivering of the building. I noticed that over the body had been fixed three bridges, like the bridge of a violin, their sides fitting into grooves in the coffin's sides, and their tops of a shape to fit the slope of the two coffin-lids when closed. One of these bridges passed over the knees of the dead lady; another bridged her stomach; the third her neck. In each of them was a hole, and across each of the three holes passed a string from the morrice-bell above it—the three holes being thus divided by the three tight strings into six semi-circles. Before I could guess the significance of all this, Harfager closed the folding coffin-lids, which had little holes for the passage of the three strings. He then turned the key in the lock, and uttered a word which I took to be "come."

Aith now took hold of the handle at the coffin's head; and out of the dark parts of the hall a lady in black walked forward. She was tall, pallid, of imposing aspect; and from the curvature of her nose, and her circular ears, I guessed her the lady Swertha, aunt of Harfager. Her eyes were quite red—if with crying I could not tell.

Harfager and I taking each a handle near the coffin-foot, and the lady bearing before us one of the black candlesticks, the obsequies began. When I got to the doorway, I noticed in a corner there two more coffins, engraved with the names Harfager and his aunt. Thence we wound our way down a

wide stairway winding to a lower floor; and descending thence still lower by narrow brass steps, came to a portal of metal, where the lady, depositing the candlestick, left us.

The chamber of death into which we now bore the body had for its outer wall the brazen outer wall of the whole house at a spot where this closely approached the cataract, and was no doubt profoundly drowned in the world of surge without: so that the earthquake there was urgent. On every side the place was piled with coffins, ranged high and wide upon shelves; and the huge rush and scampering which ensued on our entrance proved it the paradise of troops of rats. As it was inconceivable that these could have eaten a way through sixteen brazen feet—for even the floor here was brazen—I assumed that some fruitful pair must have found in the house, on its building, an ark from the waters. Even this guess, though, seemed wild; and Harfager afterwards confided to me his suspicion that they had for some reason been *placed* there by the original builder.

We deposited our load upon a stone bench in the centre; whereupon Aith made haste to be away. Harfager then repeatedly walked from end to end of the place, scrutinising with many a stoop and peer and upward stretch, the shelves and their props. Could he, I was led to wonder, have any doubts as to their soundness? Damp, in fact, and decay pervaded everything. A bit of timber which I touched crumbled to dust under my thumb.

He presently beckoned to me, and, with yet one halt and "*Hark!*" from him, we passed through the house to my chamber; where, left alone, I paced about, agitated with a vague anger; then tumbled to an agony of slumber.

In the far interior of the mansion even the bleared day of this land of bleakness never rose upon our gloom; but I was able to regulate my gettings-up by a clock which stood in my chamber; or I was called by Harfager, with whom in a short time I renewed more than all our former friendship. That I should say *more* is curious: but so it *was*: and this was proved by the fact that we grew to take, and to excuse, freedoms of speech and of manner which, as two persons of more than usual reserve, we had once never dreamed of permitting to ourselves in respect of each other. Once, for example, in our pacings of aimless haste down passages that vanished in shadow and length of perspective remoteness, he wrote that my step was very slow. I replied that it was just such a step as suited my then mood. He wrote: "You have developed a tendency to *fret*." I was very offended, and said: "Certainly, there are more fingers than one in the world which *that* ring will fit!"

Another day he was no less than rude to me for seeking to reveal to him the secret of the unhuman keenness of his hearing—and of mine! For I, too, to my dismay, began, as time passed, to catch hints of shouted sounds. The cause might be found, I asserted, in a fervour of the auditory nerve, which, if the cataract were absent, the roar of the ocean, and the row of the perpetual tempest round us, might by themselves be sufficient to bring about; his own ear-interior, I said, must be inflamed to an exquisite pitch of fever; and I named the disease to him as the "Paracusis Wilisü." When he frowned dissent, I, quite undeterred, proceeded to relate the case (that had occurred within my own experience) of a very deaf lady who could hear the drop of

a pin in a railway-train*; and now he made me the reply: "Of ignorant people I am accustomed to consider the mere scientist the most ignorant!"

But I, for my part, regarded it as merely far-fetched that he should pretend to be in the dark as to the morbid state of his hearing! He himself, indeed, confessed to me his own, Aith's, and the lady Swertha's proneness to paroxysms of *vertigo*. I was startled! for I had myself shortly previously been roused out of sleep by feelings of reeling and nausea, and an assurance that the room furiously flew round with me. The impression passed away, and I attributed it, perhaps hastily, to some disturbance in the nerve-endings of "the labyrinth," or inner ear. In Harfager, however, the conviction of whirling motions in the house, in the world, got to so horrible a degree of certainty, that its effects sometimes resembled those of lunacy or energuminal possession. Never, he said, was the sensation of giddiness altogether dead in him; seldom the sensation that he gazed with stretched-out arms over the brink of abysses which wooed his half-consenting foot. Once, as we walked, he was hurled as by unearthly powers to the ground, and there for an hour sprawled, bathed in sweat, with distraught bedazzlement and amaze in his stare, which watched the racing walls. He was constantly racked, moreover, with the consciousness of sounds so peculiar in their character, that I could account for them on no other supposition than that of a *tinnitus* infinitely sick. Through the roar there sometimes visited him, he told me,

* Such cases are known to many medical men. The concussion on the deaf nerve is the cause of the acquired sensitiveness; nor is there any limit to that sensitiveness when the tumult is immensely augmented.

the lullaby of some bird, from the burden of whose song he had the consciousness that she derived from a very remote country, was of the whiteness of foam, and crested with a comb of mauve. Or else he knew of accumulated human tones, distant, yet articulate, busily contending in volumnity, and in the end melting into a medley of musical movements. Or, anon, he was shocked by an infinite and imminent crashing, like the monstrous racket of the crackling of a cosmos of crockery round his ears. He told me, moreover, that he could frequently see, rather than hear, the particoloured wheels of a mazy sphere-music deep, deep within the black dark of the cataract's roar. These impressions, which I protested *must* be merely entotic had sometimes a pleasing effect upon him, and he would stand long to listen with a lifted hand to their seduction: others again inflamed him to a mad anger. I guessed that they were the cause of those "*Harks!*" that at intervals of about an hour did not fail to break from him. But in this I was wrong: and it was with a thrill of dismay that I soon came to know the truth.

For, as we were once passing by an iron door on the lower floor, he stopped, and for some minutes stood listening with a leer most keen and cunning. Presently the cry "*Hark!*" escaped him; and he then turned to me and wrote on the tablet: "Did you not hear?" I had heard nothing but the roar; and he howled into my ear in sounds now audible to me as an echo caught far off in dreams: "You shall see."

He took up the candlestick; produced from the pocket of his robe a key; unlocked the iron door; and we passed into a room very loftily domed in proportion to its area, and empty, save that a pair of steps lay against its wall, and that

in the centre of its marble floor was a pool, like a Roman "impluvium," only round like the room—a pool evidently profound in depth, full of a thick and inky fluid. I was very perturbed by its present aspect, for as the candle burned upon its surface, I observed that this had been quite recently *disturbed*, in a style for which the shivering of the house could not account, since *ripples* of slime were now rounding out from its middle to its brink. When I glanced at Harfager for explanation, he gave me a signal to wait; and now for about an hour, with his hands behind his back, paced the chamber; but then paused, and we two stood together by the pool's margin, gazing into the water. Suddenly his clutch tightened on my arm, and I saw, with a touch of horror, a tiny ball, probably of lead, but daubed blood-red by some chemical, fall from the roof, and sink into the middle of the pool. It hissed on contact with the water a whiff of mist.

"In the name of all that is sinister," I whispered, "what thing is this?"

Again he made me a busy and confident signal to wait, moved the ladder-steps toward the pool, handed me the taper. When I had mounted, holding high the light, I saw hanging out of the fogs in the dome a globe of old copper, lengthened into balloon-shape by a neck, at the end of which I could spy a tiny hole. Painted over the globe was barely visible in red print-letters:

"HARFAGER-HOUS: 1389-188."

I was down quicker than I went up!

"But the meaning?" I panted.

"Did you see the writing?"

"Yes. The meaning?"

He wrote: "By comparing Gascoigne with Thrunster, I find that the house was *built* about 1389."

"But the last figures?"

"After the last 8," he replied, "there is another figure not quite obliterated by a tarnish-spot."

"What figure?" I asked.

"It cannot be read, but may be surmised. As the year 1888 is now all but passed, it can only be the figure 9."

"Oh, you are depraved in mind!" I cried, very irritated: "you assume—you *state*—in a manner which no mind trained to base its conclusions on facts can bear with patience."

"And you are irrational," he wrote. "You know, I suppose, the formula of Archimedes by which, the diameter of a globe being known, its volume also is known? Now, the diameter of that globe in the dome I know to be four and a half feet; and the diameter of the leaden balls about the third of an inch. Supposing, then, that 1389 was the year in which the globe was full of balls, you may readily calculate that not many fellows of the four million and odd which have since dropped at the rate of one an hour are now left within. The fall of the balls *cannot* persist another year. The figure 9 is therefore forced upon us."

"But you assume, Harfager!" I cried: "Oh, believe me, my friend, this is the very wantonness of wickedness! By what algebra of despair do you know that each ball represents one of the scions of your house, or that the last date was intended to correspond with the stoppage of the horologe. And, even if so, what is the significance of it? It can have *no significance!*"

"Do you want to madden me?" he shouted. Then furiously

writing; "I swear that I know nothing of its significance! But it is not evident to you that the thing is a big hour-glass, intended to count the hours, not of a day, but of a cycle; and of a cycle of five hundred years?"

"But the whole contrivance," I passionately cried, "is a baleful phantasm of our brains! How is the fall of the balls regulated? Ah, my friend, you wander—your mind is debauched in this brawl of waters."

"I have not ascertained," he replied, "by what internal works, or clammy medium, or spiral coil, dependent probably for its action upon the vibration of the mansion, the balls are retarded in their fall: that was a matter well within the skill of the mediaeval mechanic, the inventor of the clock; but this at least is clear, that one element of their retardation is the smallness of the aperture through which they have to pass; that this element, by known laws of statics, will cease to operate when no more than three balls remain; and that, consequently, the last three will fall at almost the same instant."

"In Heaven's name!" I exclaimed, careless now what folly I poured out, "but your mother is dead, Harfager! Do you deny that there remain but you and the Lady Swertha?"

A glance of disdain was all the answer he then gave me as to this.

But he confessed to me a day later that the leaden drops were a constant sorrow to his ears; that from hour to hour his life was a keen waiting for their fall; that even from his brief sleeps he infallibly started awake at each descent; that in whatever region of the mansion he chanced to be, they found him out with a crashing *loudness*; and that each crash

tweaked him with a twinge of anguish within the ear. I was therefore shocked at his declaration that these droppings had now become as the life of life to him; had acquired an entwining so close with the tone of his mind, that their ceasing might even mean for him the reeling of Reason: at which confession he sobbed, with his face buried, as he leant upon a column. When this paroxysm was past, I asked him if it was out of the question that he should once for all cast off the fascination of the horologe, and escape with me from the place. He wrote in mysterious reply: "A *three-fold* cord is not easily broken." I started, asking—"How three-fold?" He wrote with a bitter smile: "To be in love with pain—to pine after aching—is not that a wicked madness?" I stood astonished that he had unconsciously quoted Gascoigne! "a wicked madness!" "a lecherous anguish!" "You have seen my aunt's face," he proceeded; "your eyes were dim if you did not see in it an impious calm, the glee of a blasphemous patience, a grin behind her daring smile." He then spoke of a prospect at the terror of which his whole soul trembled, yet which sometimes laughed in his heart in the form of a *hope*. It was the prospect of any considerable increase in the volume of sound about his ears. At *that*, he said, the brain must totter. On the night of my arrival the noise of my boots, and, since then, my voice occasionally raised, had produced acute pain in him. To such an ear, I understood him to say, the luxury of torture involved in a large sound-increase around was an allurement from which no human virtue could turn: and when I said that I could not even conceive such an increase, much less the means by which it could be effected, he brought out from the archives

of the mansion some annals kept by the heads of his family. From these it appeared that the tempests that ever lacerated the latitude of Rayba did not fail to give place, at intervals of some years, to one mammoth madness, one Samson among the merry men, and Sirius among the suns. At such periods the rains descended—and the floods came—even as in the first world-deluge; those *rösts*, or eddies, which ever encircled Rayba, spurning then the bands of lateral space, burst aloft into a whirl of water-spouts, to dance about the little land, upon which, converging, some of them discharged their waters: and the locks which flowed to the cataract thus redoubled their volume, and crashed with redoubled roar. Harfager said it was miraculous that for eighteen years no such grand event had transacted itself at Rayba.

"And what," I asked "in addition to the dropping balls, and the prospect of an increase of sound, is the third strand of that '*three-fold cord*' of which you have spoken."

For answer he led me to a circular hall which, he said, he had ascertained to be the centre of the circular mansion. It was a very large hall—so large as I think I never saw—so large that the amount of wall lighted at one time by the candle seemed nearly flat: and nearly the whole of its area, from floor to roof, was occupied by a column of brass, the space between the wall and column being only such as to admit of a stretched-out arm.

"This column," Harfager wrote, "goes up to the dome and passes beyond it; it goes down to the lower floor, and passes through that; it goes down thence to the brazen flooring of the vaults and *passes through that* into the bedrock. Under each floor it spreads out, helping to support the floor. What

is the precise quality of the impression which I have made upon your mind by this description?"

"I do not know," I answered, turning from him: "ask me none of your enigmas, Harfager: I feel a giddiness. . . ."

"But answer me," he said: "consider *the strangeness* of that brazen lowest floor, which I have discovered to be some six feet thick, and whose under-surface, I have reason to think, is somewhat *above* the bed-rock; remember that the fabric is at no point *fastened* to the column; think of the *chains* which ray out from the outer wall, apparently *anchoring* the house to the ground. Tell me, what impression have I *now* made?"

"And is it for *this* you wait?" I cried. "Yet there may have been no malevolent intention! You jump at conclusions! Any fixed building in such a land and spot as this would at any time be liable to be broken up by some sovereign tempest! What if it was the intention of the builder that in such a case the chains should break, and the building, by yielding, be saved?"

"You have no lack of charity at least," he replied; and we then went back to the book we were reading together.

He had not wholly lost the old habit of study, although he could no longer get himself to *sit* to read; so with a volume (often tossed down) he would stamp about within the region of the lamplight; or I, unconscious of my voice, might read to him. By a whim of his mood the few books which now lay within the limits of his patience had all for their motive something of the *picaresque*, or the foppishly speculative: Quevedo's "Tacaño"; or the system of Tycho Brahe; above all, George Hakewill's "Power and Providence

of God." One day, however, as I read, he interrupted me with the sentence, *à propos* of nothing: "What I cannot understand is that you, a scientist, should believe that life ceases with the ceasing of breathing"—and from that moment the tone of our reading changed. For he led me to the crypts of the library in the lowest part of the building, and hour after hour, with a *furore* of triumph overwhelmed me with books proving the length of life after "death." What, he asked, was my opinion of Baron Verulam's account of the dead man who was heard to utter words of prayer? or of the bounding bowels of the dead convict? On my expressing unbelief, he seemed surprised, and reminded me of the writhings of dead cobras, of the long beating of a frog's heart after "death." "She is not dead," he quoted, "but *sleepeth*." The idea of Bacon and Paracelsus that the principle of life resides in a spirit or fluid was proof to him that such fluid could not, from its very nature, undergo any *sudden* annihilation, while the organs which it pervades remain. When I asked what limit he, then, set to the persistence of "life" in the "dead," he answered that when decay had so far advanced that the nerves could no longer be called nerves, or when the brain had been disconnected at the neck from the body, as by rats gnawing, then the king of terrors was king verily. With an indiscretion strange to me before my residence at Rayba, I now blurted out the question whether in all this he could be referring to his mother? For a while he stood thoughtful, then wrote: "Even if I had not had reason to believe that my own and Swertha's life in some way hung upon the final cessations of hers, I should still have taken precautions to ascertain the march of the destroyer on her

frame: as it is, I shall not lack even the exactest information." He then explained that the rats which ran riot in the place of death would in time do their full work upon her; but would be unable to reach to the region of the throat without first gnawing their way through the three strings stretched across the holes of the bridges within the coffin, and thus, one by one, liberating the three morrisco-bells to tinklings.

The winter solstice had gone, another year began. I was sleeping a deep sleep by night when Harfager came into my chamber, and shook me. His face was ghastly in the taper's glare. A change within a short time had taken place upon him. He was hardly the same. He was like some poor wight into whose surprised eyes in the night have pried the eyes of Affright.

He said that he was aware of strainings and creakings, which gave him the feeling of being suspended in airy spaces by a thread which must break to his weight; and he begged me, for God's sake, to accompany him to the coffins. We passed together through the house, he craven, haggard, his gait now laggard, into the chamber of the dead, where he stole to and fro examining the shelves. Out of the footless coffin of the dowager trembling on its bench I saw a water-rat crawl; and as Harfager passed beneath one of the shortest of the shelves which bore one coffin, it suddenly dropped from a height to dust at his feet. He screamed the cry of a frightened creature; tottered to my support; and I bore him back to the upper parts of the palace.

He sat, with his face buried, in a corner of a small chamber, doddering, overtaken, as it were, with the extremity of age, no longer marking with his "*Hark!*" the fall of the

leaden drops. To my remonstrances he responded only with the moan, "so soon!" Whenever I looked for him, I found him there, his manhood now collapsed in an ague. I do not think that during this time he slept.

On the second night, as I was approaching him, he sprang suddenly upright with the outcry: "The first bell is tinkling!"

And he had scarcely screamed it when, from some long way off, a faint wail, which at its origin must have been a fierce shriek, reached my now feverish ears. Harfager, for his part, clapped his palms to his ears, and dashed from his place, I following in hot chase through the black breadth of the mansion: till we came to a chamber containing a candelabrum, and arrased in faded red. On the floor in swoon lay the lady Swertha, her dark-gray hair in disarray wrapping her like an angry sea; tufts of it scattered, torn from the roots; and on her throat prints of strangling fingers. We bore her to her bed in an alcove; and, having discovered some tincture in a cabinet, I administered it between her fixed teeth. In her rapt countenance I saw that death was not; and, as I found something appalling in her aspect, shortly afterwards left her to Harfager.

When I next saw him his manner had undergone a kind of change which I can only describe as gruesome. It resembled the officious self-importance seen in a person of weak intellect who spurs himself with the thought, "to business! the time is short!" while his walk sickened me with a hint of *ataxie locomotrice*. When I asked him as to his aunt, as to the meaning of the marks of violence on her body, bending ear to his deep and unctuous tones, I could hear: "An attempt has been made upon her life by the skeleton, Aith."

He seemed not to share my astonishment at this thing! nor could give me any clear answer as to his reason for retaining such a servant, or as to the origin of Aith's service. Aith, he told me, had been admitted into the palace during the period of his own absence in youth, and he knew little of him beyond the fact that he was extraordinarily strong. *Whence* he had come, or how, no person except the lady Swertha was aware: and she, it seems, feared, or at least persistently flinched from admitting him into the mystery. He added that, as a matter of fact, the lady, from the day of his coming back to Rayba, had with some object imposed upon herself a dumbness on all subjects, which he had never once known her to break through, except by an occasional note.

With an ataxic strenuousness, with the airs of a drunken man constraining himself to ordered action, Harfager now set himself to the doing of a host of trivial things: he collected chronicles and arranged them in order of date; he docketed or ticketed packets of documents; he insisted upon my assistance in turning the faces of paintings to the wall. He was, however, now constantly stopped by bursts of vertigo, six times in a single hour being hurled to the ground, while blood frequently guttered from his ears. He complained to me in a tone of piteous wail of the wooing of a silver *piccolo* that continually seduced him. As he bent, sweating, over his momentous nothings, his hands fluttered like aspen. I noted the movements of his whimpering lips, the rheum of his sunken eyes: sudden doting had come upon his youth.

On a day he threw it utterly off, and was young anew. He

entered my room; roused me from dreams; I observed the lunacy of bliss in his eyes, heard his hiss in my ear:

"Up! *The storm!*"

Ah! I had known it—in the nightmare of the night. I felt it in the air of the room. It had come. I saw it lurid by the lamplight on the hell of Harfager's face.

A glee burst at once into birth within me, as I sprang from my couch, glancing at the clock: it was eight—in the morning. Harfager, with the naked stalk of some maniac prophet, had already taken himself away; and I started out after him. A deepening was clearly felt in the quivering of the edifice; anon for a second it stopped still, as if, breathlessly, to listen; its air was troubled with a vague gustiness. Occasionally there came to me as it were the noising of some far-off lamentation and voice in Ramah, but whether this was in my ear or the screaming of the gale I could not tell; or again I could hear one clear chord of an organ's vaunt. About noon I spied Harfager, lamp in hand, running along a corridor, with naked soles. As we met he looked at me, but hardly with recognition, and passed by; stopped, however, and ran back to howl into my ear the question: "Would you *see?*" He then beckoned before me, and I followed to a very small opening in the outer wall, closed with a slab of brass. As he lifted the latch, the slab dashed inward with instant impetuosity and tossed him a long way, while the breath of the tempest, braying through the brazen tube with a brutal bravura, caught and pinned me upon a corner of a wall, and all down the corridor a long crashing racket of crowds of pictures and couches followed. I nevertheless managed to

push my way on the belly to the opening. Hence the sea should have been visible; but my senses were met by nothing but a vision of tumbled tenebrousness, and a general impression of the letter O. The sun of Rayba had gone out. In a moment of opportunity our two forces got the shutter shut again.

"Come!"—he had obtained a fresh glimmer, and beckoned before me—"let's go see how the dead fare in the great desolation:" and we ran, but had hardly got to the middle of the stairway, when I was thrilled by the consciousness of some great shock, the bass of a dull thud, which nothing save the thumping to the floor of the whole lump of the coffins could have caused. I looked for Harfager, and for a moment only saw his heels skedaddling, panic-hounded, his ears stopped, his mouth round! Then, indeed, fear reached me—a tremor in the audacity of my heart, a thought that now at any rate I must desert him in his extremity, and work out my own salvation. Yet it was with hesitancy that I turned to search for him for the last farewell—a hesitancy which I felt to be not unselfish, but selfish, and unhealthy. I rambled through the night, seeking light, and having happened upon a lamp, proceeded to seek for Harfager. Several hours went by in this way, during which I could not doubt from the state of the air in the house that the violence about me was being wildly heightened. Sounds as of screams—unreal, like the shriekings of demons—now reached my ears. As the time of night came on, I began to detect in the greatly augmented baritone of the cataract a fresh character—a shrillness—the whistle of a rapture—a malice—the menace of a rabies blind

and deaf. It must have been at about the hour of six that I found Harfager. He sat in an obscure room, with his brow bowed down, his hands on his knees, his face covered with hair, and with blood from the ears. The right sleeve of his robe had been rent away in some renewed attempt, I imagined, to manage a window; and the rather crushed arm hung lank from the shoulder. For some time I stood and eyed him mouthing his mumblings; but now that I had found him uttered nothing as to my departure. Presently he looked sharply up with the call "*Hark!*"—then with impatience, "*Hark! Hark!*"—then with a shout, "*The second bell!*" And *again*, in immediate sequence upon his shout, there sounded a wail, vague yet real, through the house. Harfager at the instant dropped reeling with giddiness; but I, snatching up a lamp, dashed out, shivering but eager. For some while the wild wailing went on (either actually, or by reflex action of my ear); and as I ran for the lady's apartment, I saw opposite to it the open door of an armoury, into which I passed, caught up a battle-axe, and was now about to dart in to her aid, when Aith, with a blazing eye, shied out of her chamber. I cast up my axe, and, shouting, dashed forward to down him: but by some chance the lamp fell from me, and before I knew anything more, the axe sprang from my grasp, and I was cast far backward by some most grim vigour. There was, however, enough light shining out of the chamber to show that the skeleton had darted into a door of the armoury, so I instantly slammed and locked the door near me by which I had procured the axe, and hurrying to the other, secured it, too. Aith was thus a prisoner. I then entered the

lady's chamber. She lay over the bed in the alcove, and to my bent ear grossly croaked the ruckle of death. A glance at her mangled throat convincing me that her last moments were come, I settled her on the bed, curtained her within the loosened festoons of the hangings of black, and turned from the cursedness of her aspect. On an *escritoire* near I noticed a note, intended apparently for Harfager: "I mean to defy, and fly; not from fear, but for the delight of the defiance itself. *Can* you come?" Taking a flame from the candela-brum, I left her to her loneliness, and throes of her death.

I had passed some way backward when I was startled by a queer sound—a crash—resembling the crash of a tamboureen; and as I could hear it pretty clearly, and from a distance, this meant some prodigious energy. In two minutes it again broke out; and thenceforth at regular intervals—with an effect of pain upon me; and the conviction grew gradually within me that Aith had unhung two of the old brass shields from their pegs, and holding them by their handles, and dashing them viciously together, thus expressed the frenzy that had now overtaken him. When I found my way back to Harfager, very anguish was now stamping in him about the chamber; he shook his head like a tormented horse, brushing and barring from his hearing each crash of the brass shields. "Ah, when—when——" he hoarsely groaned into my ear, "will that ruckle cease in her throat? I will myself, I tell you—*with my own hand*—oh God . . ." Since the morning his auditory fever (as indeed my own also) appeared to have increased in steady proportion with the roaring and screeching chaos round; and the death-struggle in

the lady's throat bitterly filled for him the intervals of the grisly cymbaling of Aith. He presently sent twinkling fingers into the air, and, with his arms cast out, darted into the darkness.

And again I sought him, and long again in vain. As the hours passed, and the day deepened toward its baleful midnight, the cry of the now redoubled cataract, mixed with the mass and majesty of the now climatic tempest, took on too intentional a *shriek* to be longer tolerable to any reason. My own mind escaped my sway, and went its way: for here in the hot-bed of fever I was fevered. I wandered from chamber to chamber, precipitate, dizzy on the upbuoyance of a joy. "As a man upon whom sleep seizes," so I had fallen. Even yet, as I passed near the region of the armoury, the rapturous shields of Aith did not fail to smash faintly upon my ear. Harfager I did not see, for he, too, was doubtless roaming a hurtling Ahasuerus round the world of the house. However, at about midnight, observing light shining from a door on the lower stage, I entered and saw him there—the chamber of the dropping horologe. He sat hugging himself on the ladder-steps, gazing at the gloomy pool. The final lights of the riot of the day seemed dying in his eyes; and he gave me no glance as I ran in. His hands, his bare arm, were all washed with new-shed blood; but of this, too, he looked unconscious; his mouth was hanging open to his pantings. As I eyed him, he suddenly leapt high, smiting his hands with the yell, "The last bell tinkling!" and ran out raving. He therefore did not see (though he may have understood by hearing) the thing which, with cowering awe, I now saw: for a ball slipped from

the horologe with a hiss and mist of smoke into the pool; and while the clock once ticked another: and while the clock yet ticked, another! and the smoke of the first had not perfectly thinned, when the smoke of the third, mixing with it, floated toward the dome. Understanding that the sands of the mansion were run, I, too, throwing up my arm, rushed from the spot; but was suddenly stopped in my flight by the sense of some stupendous destiny emptying its vials upon the edifice; and was made aware by a crackling racket, like musketry, above, and the downpour of a world of waters, that some waterspout, in the waltz and whirl, had hurled its broken summit upon us, and burst through the dome. At that moment I beheld Harfager running toward me, his hands buried in his hair; and, as he raced past, I caught him, crying: "Harfager, save yourself! the very fountains, Harfager—by the grand God, man"—I hissed it into his inmost ear—"the very fountains of the Great Deep . . . !" He glared at me, and went on his way, while I, whisking myself into a room, closed the door. Here for some time with weak knees I waited; but the eagerness of my frenzy pressed me, and I again stepped out, to find the corridors everywhere thigh-deep with water; while rags of the storm, bragging through the hole in the dome, were now blustering about the house. My light was at once puffed out; but I was surprised by the presence of *another* light—most ghostly, gloomy, bluish—mild, yet wild—which now gloated everywhere through the house. I was standing in wonder at this when a gust of august passion galloped up the mansion; and, with it, I was made aware of the *snap* of something

somewhere. There was a minute's infinite waiting—and then—quick—ever quicker—came the throb, snap, pop, in spacious succession, of the anchoring chains of the mansion before the hurried shoulder of the hurricane. And *again* a second of breathless stillness—and then—deliberately—its hour came—the house moved. My flesh worked like the flesh of worms which squirm. Slowly moved, and stopped—then there was a sweep—and a swirl—and a pause! then a swirl—and a sweep—and a pause! then steady labour on the brazen axis as the labourer tramps by the harrow; then a heightening of zest—then intensity—then the final light liveliness of flight. And now once again, as, staggering and plunging, I spun, the notion of escape for a moment came to me, but this time I shook an impious fist. "No, but, God, no, no," I gasped, "I will no more go from here: here let me waltzing pass in this carnival of the vortices, anarchy of the thunders!"—and I ran staggering. But memory gropes in a greyer gloaming as to all that followed. I struggled up the stairway, now flowing a river, and for a good while ran staggering and plunging, full of wild rantings, about, amid the downfall of roofs, and the ruins of walls. The air was thick with splashes, the whole roof now, save three rafters, having been snatched by the wind away; and in the blush of that bluish moonshine the tapestries were flapping and trailing wildly out after the flying place, like the streaming hair of some ranting fakir stung reeling by the tarantulas of distraction. At one point, where the largest of the porticoes protruded, the mansion began at every revolution to bump with grum shudderings against some obstruction: it bumped, and while the lips

said one-two-three it three times bumped again. It was the maenadism of mass! Swift—still swifter—in an ague of flurry it raced, every portico a sail to the gale, racking its great frame to fragments. I, running by the door of a room littered with the ruins of a wall, saw through that livid moonlight Harfager sitting on a tomb—a drum by him, upon which, with a club in his bloody fist, he feebly, but persistingly, beat. The speed of the leaning house had now attained the *sleeping* stage, that last pitch of the spinning-top; and now all at once Harfager dashed away the mat of hair which wrapped his face, sprang, stretched his arms, and began to spin—giddily—in the same direction as the mansion—nor less sleep-embathed, with lifted hair, with quivering cheeks. . . . From such a sight I shied with retching; and staggering, plunging, presently found myself on the lower floor opposite a porch, where an outer door chancing to crash before me, the breath of the tempest smote freshly upon me. On this an impulse, partly of madness, more of sanity, spurred in my soul; and I spurted out of the doorway, to be whirled far out into the limbo without.

The river at once rushed me deep-drenched toward the sea—though even there, in that depth of whirlpool, a shrill din, like the splitting of a world, reached my ears. It had hardly passed when my body butted in its course upon one of the arches, cushioned with seaweed, of the not all demolished cause-way. Nor had I utterly lost consciousness. A clutch freed my head from the drench; and in the end I heaved myself to the level of the summit. Hence to the ledge of rock by which I had come, the bridge being intact, I

rowed myself on my face under the thumps of the wind, and under a rushing of rain, like a shimmering of silk through the air. Noticing the same wild shining about me which had blushed through the broken dome into the mansion, I glanced backward—and saw that the dwelling of the Harfagers was a memory of the past; then upward—and the whole north heaven, to the zenith, shone one ocean of variegated glories—the *aurora borealis*, which was being fairly brushed and flustered by the gale. At the augustness of which sight, I was touched to a gush of tears. And with them the dream broke! the infatuation passed! a palm seemed to skin back from my brain the films and media of delusion; and on my knees I threw my hands to heaven in thankfulness for the marvel of my rescue from all the temptation, the tribulation, and the breakage, of Rayba.

The Globe of Gold-Fish

“MAGNUS—Eric—Magnus—”

Flora Macdougall tore the petals of a moon-daisy, uttering those names, her indecision as to which of them was to be *the One* having lasted since she had been eleven—it *had* to be one of them: for such was the secret of her fancy, that anyone else on earth was “out of it.”

She was sitting in a cleft or “heug,” on Monroe islet, dropping the petals into a hag of peat-water—the afternoon sun ablaze, but tempered by the breath of a Hebrides breeze whistling sweet, weird things, leading strands of her hair dancing out after it.

“Magnus—*Eric*.”

She was glad that it was Eric! And sorry that it was not Magnus.

Eric was one of the strong, still ones; Magnus was gallant and passionate, frank, handsome, and considered clever.

They three made a trinity and went together—a kind of Eric-Magnus-Flora! But did Eric and Magnus love each other *quite* so utterly as they loved Flora and Flora them? Twice Flora had had a doubt about it; and just the doubt had given her strange pain.

She was full now of Magnus's homecoming—just too late for her birthday on Thursday next—for Magnus had gone off—mysteriously!—to "see the world"—and her grandfather, meantime, had grown wondrous fond of Eric's gossip by the ingle. She hoped that Magnus's coming would not excite the old man, for whom she was anxious just now: he had received a letter that morning which he had not shown her; and had been odd ever since. . . .

But the tide would cut her off, so she ran down the steep with free and easy limbs—fair like those Norwegian Kings of the Isles—the Hacos and Haarfagers—a strain of whose wild blood still raced in her veins; her face broad-built, with sense and humour in that underlook of her eyes, and those lines of her smile.

She was half-way down the crags, when all her heart started: distinctly before her she saw Magnus Balloch—or the right side of him. In the same instant he vanished.

She stood aghast! Was she *fey*, or was it Magnus himself, come before expected? She had so distinctly seen!—the square brow, sun-browned, the brown, bright eyes! She ran to the spot; lifted her voice nervously: "*Magnus!*" Echoes answered her.

The sand was already moist with the tide when she crossed to the Butt, with a boding of trouble heavy in her. Thence to the Glen was a wilderness, all bog, briar, blocks of rock, with two tumble-down huts of unmortared stones: from which desert one stepped quite suddenly to the streams and greenery of the Glen, snugly embowered in the bosom of mountains towering round.

As she entered it, she met a crofter, who stopped to stare

at her and ask if she had "no heard the news." When she said "No," it came brutally: "Ey, then, the old Macdougall's dropped down dead."

Her emotions were so controlled that she only looked under her eyes with a sort of reproach at the man; then was flying up the Glen to "The Grange"—the home of the Macdougall "tacksmen," a low house on an island, surmounted by two moats. From the pine avenue in front she spied Eric Maclachlan under the porch just coming out, and on meeting him on the drawbridge, said: "Oh, Eric," her forehead dropping on his arm.

"Ah," he said, "you have heard. I was just going to hunt for you on Monroe."

"But, Eric, so sudden . . ."

"Keep heart. It had to be soon. Doctor's been—heart-failure—no inquest. Elspeth heard a fall, and found him in the loft—dead. Heard a murmur of voices just before, she *says*, like someone talking to him—fancy, I take it—no one about. What's odd is, that he has a kind of little bruise on his wrist—result of fall among the apples perhaps—"

"Eric," said Flora, "I knew that something had happened, or would. Oh, I have seen Magnus's wraith on Monroe."

Eric Maclachlan started and frowned. "Magnus? Is Magnus come?"

"His wraith, I said. He—vanished—"

Eric said nothing more. He had a doubt as to wraiths, his matter-of-factness appearing in that shrewd peep of his blue eyes which gave him the name of the hardest bargainer round about Glengarth. The instant he had led Flora to her dead, he was away for Monroe—and, solid though he was,

he ran with the lightest foot, like one in flight laughing back defiance at a pursuer.

He found the tide now washing choppily through the channel, so paddled from the Butt to Monroe in a "coble," and there started to clamber and stalk with the tactics of a cat.

Within ten minutes he was conscious that he was being dodged; and a game of hide-and-seek began among the crags between four of the nimblest feet, with fleeting peerings into caverns and crannies, and crafty scrambles up shortcuts to catch in the flank, and leaps across cracks in peat-moss to waylay from ambush; then down again almost to the sea eastward; and up again southward, Eric now wiping his reddened brow, with a ray bright in his eye, and a relentless pressure of his mouth that meant "must." And soon now he was looking upward from the bottom of a monstrous block or rock, hollaing up: "Got you, Magnus! But why the skedaddling? It's me!"

Up yonder at the top a form now cropped out into sight, to drop with a wild catch-as-catch-can impetuosity, harum-scarum, down, the rock's face.

"Hello, Eric," he coolly said, as he struck ground; "I'm out of trim: that's why you've run me to earth."

"Aye, that's it, Magnus," replied Eric with a grim smile; but what's the skulking about?"

"It's nothing; come today instead of Saturday, that's all."

"I see that. But why skulk from Flora and from me?"

"Does Flora say I skulked from her?"

"Says she saw your wraith!"

"Dog's luck."

"But what's the whole jimbang about?"

"Don't worry. There's some trouble on, that's all."

"Let's have it."

"No, by God. You don't betray me to Flora."

"Who would?"

"It would be to your interest."

"*Interest?*"

"Oh, quite possibly I wrong you. I don't care if I do."

"You seem remarkably funny! What's up? Changed? . . . Know, by the way, that the old man's dead?"

"Old man?"

"Oh, Magnus, you know. Why, it was you that killed him."

The other started, asking sharp: "*Who saw me?*"

"No one saw you," answered Eric; "but, great Scot, you don't suppose I can't put two and two together, lad, or that you are going to hide things from me? You never could. So sit down, and let's have the whole story."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"You shall."

"Look here, Eric, I'm changed, I'm not the same—don't worry."

Eric gripped Magnus's wrist, dragged him irresistibly to sit, and sat by him.

II

When they crossed the strait darkness was falling. Eric had then gathered much of "the story"; it appeared that a letter had been written against Magnus to the old man by

"a woman" the day before, and Magnus, knowing this, had hurried home in the hope of intercepting it; but had been late. So he had skulked to the Grange soon after noon, had found the old man in the loft, had demanded the letter, grasped his wrist; and the old man, indignant, had dropped dead. Then Magnus had skulked to Monroe.

"If ever Flora sees that letter," he said, "I—!" he rushed his finger across his throat, signifying gory tragedy; "and if you give me away to her, Eric, by heaven I wipe out all the three of us."

"Don't talk like a luny," said Eric coldly.

They made their way to the Grange, Eric rather dragging Magnus—both gallant-looking laddies who seemed to step to the screaming of bag-pipes. They were in the front room overlooking the moat, when in came Flora from making oat-cakes for the lyke-wake. One moment she stood aback on seeing Magnus, then flung her right hand on high, her left to her hip, cut the four steps of the reel, then had his two hands, swinging them, smiling, her underlook on his face. And Eric stood looking, he, too, smiling.

But when Flora asked, "Just come?" and Magnus answered "Half-hour ago," Eric groaned inwardly at the lie, with disgusted lip-corners, and without a word strolled out of the house. She, just conscious in her preoccupation with Magnus that Eric was gone, said: "What, is he gone?"

"Oh, he is angry because you are glad to see me," said Magnus.

"*Eric is?*" she asked with half a laugh of astonishment.

"I suppose that's it. You are an heiress now, too, and Eric doesn't relish the arrival of outsiders."

"*Magnus!*" she said, very shocked.

"That's how I take it. Elder brother's jealousy when the prodigal got back."

"But where's the fatted calf?" she cried, again catching his hands to swing them. "You are *come!* But looking—not so well. You will have to be pampered and made a fuss of. But on what a day you come! I don't know whether to dance or cry my eyes out!" She dropped down suddenly.

"Don't talk of that. Sit, let's talk; tomorrow is your birthday, and I have to say things to you, which—"

But now an old crofter of the Glen looked in to call Flora. There were, indeed, a good many cronies already about the house, full of the mood of funerals—the last will of the grandfather Macdougall consisting mainly of instructions as to his burial, he never dreaming that it was his weird never to be buried at all!

So Flora ran out, and Magnus, left alone, tapped on a cabinet, full of little worm-holes, thinking: "The letter is in here." And he knew that in a day or two that letter would be seen, when the old man's papers were gone through. He had to get it quickly, then; and he proceeded to try key after key of his bunch at the lock, till his sisters—three very pretty girls who "ran" the Brae Farm—hurried down from the death-bed to kiss him.

"You go back up," he said to them at once.

"But what's the matter with him?" cried one; "tell us something about yourself, can't you?"

"Oh, some other time," he said, and turned from them, sullen and dark-minded.

When again alone, he paced with quick steps, until Flora

came again; and they two sat talking in the dark on an old farmhouse settle that had compartments beneath the seat for storing bacon; till Magnus, suddenly pressing her two hands to pain in his, whispered hoarsely: "Flora, run away, and marry me!"

She, in her surprise, asked: "But, Magnus, why *run*?"

All at once he was on his knees to her, panting. "You must do what I want—or I go straight, Flora, and kill myself. Three years away from you—hungry—we'll run—to Canada—tomorrow! Don't mind about the old man—don't mind about any Eric—throw everything to the devil—"

"*Magnus!*" went Flora—very prone just now to be indulgent to the prodigal, yet conscious of some element of wrong and hollowness somewhere.

"Oh, you don't really love me!" he said pettishly, jumping up.

"Magnus, is that a new discovery?"

Before he could answer they were again interrupted by a crony, who came sniffing snuff from her mull; and Magnus dashed out of the Grange, making for the Brae Farm, his home.

But he was back again at two o'clock that morning, entering stealthily by a pantry-window, to which he had crawled under the blackness of the alders round the house. He crept through the house, sat before the cabinet, and began to ply five skeleton keys that he had filed; and it was a pallid lad who sat there in the dark, hearing the breezes eerily breathe, for he understood that just at his shoulder was the old Macdougall, watching what he did. But he defied, fumbling patiently there, making little clicks, like explosions to him; the

cabinet, however, would not open, and he did not dare to venture upon making the racket of cracking it open with a poker—with wakeful women in the house.

"See if I don't burn you to ashes," he said with a nod at it as he got up to go.

That same day was Flora's twenty-first birthday, and in that room she sat six hours later, looking at "the presents," with the thought in her mind: "Is Magnus poor?" for Magnus had sent her nothing.

But presently, to her astonishment, entered a shepherd, bearing a glass globe containing gold-fish, and then a mahogany stand, with "Many happy returns. Magnus."

Flora tried to feel pleased, but felt rather awkward, asking herself: "How will Elsie, Jennie and Mary like their goldfish being sent to me like this?" For that globe had been in the Balloch family before the year when she had put her hair up. Perhaps Magnus had bought it of his sisters? She had a sense of strangeness and apprehension.

But that was the least of the mysteries that were to knit her brows that day: the second came when she stole an hour from the house to go on her afternoon walk—up the hills, by the high-set kirk, the clachan with a name longer than its street. A mile higher she was going to sit and think in a "howe" of the fellside, when she heard a murmur of voices humming out of a deserted hovel, low and long and black with peat-smoke. Her feet, treading on peat-moss, made no sound; and when she put her eye to a hole of the hovel—which was as full of holes as a grater—she saw in there—Eric standing with a young woman. She knew the woman instantly—a farm-girl, a "randy quean," who had mysteriously

disappeared from beyond Gowanputtoch; and her head was on Eric's shoulder; and Eric was patting her shoulder.

Flora heard nothing that was said, for a lynn was singing down the hillside in her ears; but she thought she heard the woman sob once; and she was gone, thievishly, fleetly, deeply pierced.

Eric! Somehow, if it had been Magnus, she would not have been quite so lost in astonishment.

She made her escape homeward, outraged, proud-throated; and the heart in her kept calling "*Eric!*"

But her mind was drawn a little from this by yet another marvel that confronted her the minute she entered the Grange: for at once she noticed that the globe of gold-fish had been removed from the corner where she had placed it to a spot in front of the cabinet by the window; and she stood gazing down in vague astonishment at the little orange carps, which anon spurred themselves a little with their extravagant great tails, like rags wagging in the water; then, not liking them there, she moved them back to the corner; then sat staring, her tam-o'-shanter and gloves still on, with Eric on the brain. And she said with vindictive lips: "I should be very agreeable to poor Magnus today."

The clock struck four in the midst of her reverie, and she ran to see to her dead and solemn-sitting visitors. Meeting old Elspeth, she asked if *she* had moved the gold-fish—but no; and she wondered if Magnus himself, thinking that the globe looked better before the cabinet, had done it: but Magnus appeared not to have come—at least no one had seen him at the Grange that day.

Soon after five she was again approaching the front room

with some bran to give the fishes, when she started: the globe of fish was *again* before the cabinet! Instantly now she thought of ghostly fingers; but, against this theory was the fact that *Eric* was now standing in there, frowning down at the gold-fish—angrily, it seemed. Could that be a fact, what Magnus had hinted, that Eric was jealous of Magnus? and of Magnus's gift of the fish? Such a thought, new to her, offended her profoundly: but she was ready now to believe evil things of Eric after what her eyes had seen in the hovel. Was it Eric, then, who, for some reason, had twice—secretly—moved the gold-fish from the corner to the cabinet? Certainly Eric *was* interested in the position of the fish, for he now suddenly took up globe and stand, and carried them *from* the cabinet to the corner.

Flora stole away from the door, not able to bear to speak with Eric just then; and she went to sit and think out this enigma.

Later, before going to get some sleep, she again peeped into the room, and saw the gold-fish still in the corner; and in the morning she looked again; and they were still there.

But, as she was slipping out in the afternoon for a breath on the fells, she looked again, and with a shock now of horror, saw that the fish were once more before the cabinet. Yet, this time, Eric had not been in the house, to her knowledge, nor had Magnus: so that again a thought of spirit-hands came back strongly to her. She resolved not to dare to move that globe again from before the cabinet.

She went out full of wonder and trouble; and did not come back till four.

It was on her return, when coming up the avenue, that

she saw a small crowd just crossing the drawbridge toward the house: they seemed to be bearing something heavy in their midst; she ran to see—and lifted her voice in a lamentable cry.

It was Magnus Balloch whom they were bearing—ashen, unconscious; all bloody in front; stabbed—discovered so in one of the hovels on the Butt.

Who had stabbed him there was nothing to show: but a wild surmise occurred in the back of Flora Macdougall's brain, which took the form of the word "*Eric?*"; and in that instant she bitterly hated.

When they had got Magnus on her bed, she poured wild beseechings into his ear before them all—"Don't die—then whatever you like—we will care for nobody—" But in the midst of it she suddenly flew—to bring the doctor, for everybody had stood flabbergasted, and done nothing.

She had to run up to the Glen's end, and then wrung her hands in an agony—the doctor away up in the clachan! Up she pelted, and met him half-way, "whigging" leisurely down on his old gallows. When she had gasped her passion of tidings, she ran by his side.

"Will it be in the right breast or the left that he's wounded?" he asked her.

"In the right!"

"Then it will not be fatal, never fear," he said.

They stopped to get lint, antiseptic; then on again, both on foot now. But half-way down the Glen their race was checked by a sight which drew from the old man an "Eh, whow, lassie, what's that?" Flora was voiceless. Beyond a mass of foliage a rolling smoke rose into the air.

They flew anew, and as soon as ever they rounded into the pine avenue, a tragic outcry leapt from the doctor's mouth: "Great God! the Grange is all in flames!"

Flora did not stop running. The question for her now was whether Magnus had, or had not, been brought out of the house—whether the flames had not sprung too suddenly upon the women to permit of his rescue. She could not clearly see to the porch for the people who came fleeing from the heat and reek.

He was not on the bridge. He was not in the porch . . . She understood that he was lying unconscious in the fire. And she dashed into it . . .

As she dashed, a shout rang after her: "Flora, stop!"—from Eric, who, just arrived, had been running up the avenue some way behind her. His instincts had leapt to the guess that she was rushing to the rescue of Magnus, and he estimated that she was well too late: for the Grange was wooden, clinker-built, aged, and was raging already like a "cutch-fire" in November.

But even as he howled at her, she vanished into the cloud pouring out from the porch; and two seconds after her he vanished into it, too.

He butted upon her just at the stair-foot, and, too blinded and choked to utter useless beseechings, seized her. Only one gasp he heard from her—"Mind you, Eric!"—and then, in silence, they began their battle. A battle of a terrible, long minute: venomous, hissing with activities, and quickly intensifying to a cat-o'-mountain franticness in that red air. He had know that she was strong; but, strong as he himself was, her strength astonished him. However, he got her struggling

to the ground, and when he was dragged down over her, covered up her nose and mouth with his large palm, to have her quickly still. Soon she lay conquered; and he staggered out with her on his shoulder, both well singed.

III

A week later Flora, burnt out of "house and hauld," and staying at the Brae Farm, was sitting convalescent under an outlying hedge, when the young woman of Gowanputtoch whom she had seen in the hovel with Eric approached her, bade her the time of day, and—burst into tears.

"Oh, I must e'en tell ye," she wailed, "and you may give me over to the police, if fit you see. Him ye sit there grieving for, it was my hand that put the steel into him."

Flora looked lugubriously under her eyes, but said nothing.

"He was my husband," the woman added; and out came the whole tearful tale. Magnus had very honourably married her at the period when she had disappeared three years previously. But he had more and more hungered after Flora; and at last had darted back to the Glen. Seeing which, the wife had written to the grandfather Macdougall that Magnus was a married man; and then in a rage of jealousy had rushed down after him from London. He, on seeing her, had dashed into a passion, and had handled her roughly in a hovel up in the fell, till Mr. Eric Maclachan had stepped in and rescued her. And the next day, in the fury of a new quarrel on the Butt, she had stabbed him with a hat-pin . . .

Flora uttered never a word while the story was being told; and this dumbness made the woman rather awkward, so on

seeing Eric coming up the lane, she sighed, "God help us a'," and went on her way.

Eric had come to seek Flora here, though she had not spoken with him since their wild fight in the fire. He stood looking down upon her, and she looking upon the ground; and in their silence a throstle sang to the afternoon sun from the alder overhead.

"Well, you look a bit better," he said at last.

"Dear," she said, "sit with me, even though I have had strange, wrong thoughts of you."

He sat, and played with her hand.

"So you knew that Magnus was married," she murmured, "and did not tell me."

"And set you, Flora, against Magnus for life . . ." he muttered.

"How you loved him, Eric! Yet I have questioned if you loved him, and the mere doubt has embittered me against you. Why did you go out of the room so crossly the night he came?"

"Because Magnus was telling lies to you. Let me tell you the worst of Magnus, so that you may love him justly. Magnus was *married*, and yet allowed himself to come down hot for you—that's against him. And do you know that it was Magnus who made that bruise on the old man's wrist, and caused his death? But that's not against him, for he meant no harm—told me so, and he never told a lie in his life, except to you—you know why. And do you know that it was Magnus who burnt down the Grange with his madness?"

"But—he was lying unconscious when the fire broke out!"

"*He* burnt it all right. He wanted to destroy the cabinet, in which there was a letter that his wife had written: and he did it with that globe of gold-fish—Yes, and I guessed, mind, what he was up to, and ought to have smashed the thing to smithereens. You see, when Magnus was a nipper that same globe set fire to a curtain at the Brae—acts as a burning-glass! and he reckoned it up that the afternoon sun, raying in by that southwest window through the globe, would set the curtains burning, the curtains the cabinet—"

"Well, if I had only dreamed—!" breathed Flora.

"That was how it was," said Eric. "He thought that he would be there to put out the fire in time—little did he think that he was moving that bowl there to consume his own bones—ill-fated head. But that was Magnus—clever-headed—headlong—ill-fated. And now—Flora—Magnus is dead—our lad—"

"Never mind!" She put her lips on his hand. "We love him for ever as much as we love each other, or our own lives. Maybe, somewhere, our love outweighs all his sins . . ."

Her forehead dropped toward his knee; and Eric, in brushing away a stinging-midge, contrived to brush his eyes flyingly with his hand.

Many a Tear

"God counts a woman's tears."—THE TALMUD

I FIRST heard the name of Margaret Higgs one gloomy afternoon, when passing over the Chase by Tydenham, with Severn (they don't say "*the*" Severn there) trailing itself away through a vale of haze far down on my right. The aged clergyman I was making the journey with showed me the mass of rags and grey locks, where the woman sat alone on a rock on the Chase, saying to me—

"Mark that woman, a remarkable being I assure you, a woman who during sixteen years has plumbed even the deeps of human woe; for I say that if ever the arm of the Almighty bared itself to be known openly in the affairs of men, it was in that life. There, like a pine blighted by the lightning's wrath, sits Margaret now, a living pledge of that Power which governs the world."

He spoke with no little solemnity, though I must say that when he went on to tell me the facts, he left me utterly unconvinced of this "arm of the Almighty"; and I hope that by this time he, too, has nobler thoughts with regard to Margaret Higgs.

"I remember her when she had no resemblance to the

object you see there," he told me, "a shapely wench with a tripping run on her toes, soft-spoken and most soft-eyed, dark blue eyes and black hair, a gay gossip—'news-hunter' they say here—with a prayer-book in her hand in the lanes on Sunday, and a name for 'knocking around' with the young men; one of those earth-born souls of this part, unconscious of a world beyond Severn—save of Gloucester, because the magistrates say to the naughty ones: 'Go to Gloucester for a month.'

"She came of good farmer-folk in a small way, who died almost together, upon which Margaret chose to marry beneath her, a quarry-man from the Wyebanks near, a thick-set, rather taciturn and nervous person, named Higgs, a widower some fifteen years Margaret's senior. He had a son of twelve or so called Fred Higgs; and I think I have heard it said that as a girl Margaret had had the nursing of this boy, and that it was her fondness for the boy which caused the heiress to make choice of the father.

"Well, Margaret and Higgs got on very well for several years. I have observed them driving toward St. Bride's of a week-end to market, frequently have called in to visit them, and they appeared happy. However, one summer there came to lodge with them a stranger—a sailor they say he was, though, as the house stands well out of the way in a bower, and as the stranger never at all showed his nose abroad, not much is known of him; one or two, however, of the Woolaston villagers lower down the mountain—a group of people known as the most 'news-hunting' in the country—gave it out that the stranger was a good-looking chap, and that Margaret had lost her heart to him; a tale which was con-

firmed when he was one afternoon loudly ordered out of the house by Higgs, and was observed to pass out of the house and away over the mountains.

"Well, some time after nine that night, when the boy Fred Higgs went to bed, Margaret, from motives of revenge, probably, destroyed her husband; for from that night Higgs has never been seen, and a daft fellow called Felix, who would frequently roam the countryside all night, reported that near three that morning he had seen Mrs. Higgs struggling in a storm across the fields towards Severn beneath the burden of a body.

"This was all the evidence to begin with, except the queer fact that Margaret breathed not a syllable to anyone with regard to her husband's disappearance; but other signs and evidences soon followed, as I have told you, from—Heaven itself.

"Owing, maybe, to the fact that this witness, Felix, was not a man able to appreciate the nature of an oath, the police took no open action in the matter; and at this apparent sluggishness of the law, you never saw such a gush of fury, every boatman for miles up the two rivers becoming an eye to scan the waters for a body; and both where the banks are all mud, and where there are reaches of beach, parties of diggers, organised by the villagers, were ferreting for a buried body.

"Well, no body was ever discovered; but by society, I can tell you, a way was discovered to avenge itself, and the woman was punished. The baker's cart ceased to wait at Woodside farm, the butcher declined to deal; even so far off as St. Bride's and the Forest of Dean Margaret Higgs

could neither sell her starved calf nor get meal for her pig, nor find a forgiving smile.

" 'Her's done away wi'n right enough,' was the word everywhere: 'hanging be too good for she, and shame ought to cover the face of the police.'

"Passing by the farm one morning, I walked up the garden-path, and saw Margaret. The round of industry there was suspended now, her stepson appeared to be aiming shots at imaginary rabbits, and the young woman, swinging her knee between her hands, was seated on the door-sill of her snowy low home. She sprang up to offer me a chair, and I said then sorrowfully to her: 'Well, Mrs. Higgs, things are not so well with you as they have been,' at which she at once became visibly inflamed, and cried out, 'the gossiping, news-hunting lot, ignorant as wagon-horses! I do have nothing off they, Mr. Somerset! They don't keep me! Why should I trouble about what they have to say?'

" 'But how, Mrs. Higgs, do you propose to live, to manage the farm?' I asked.

" 'I did live and find bread for the boy before, and I'll do it again, sir,' she answered.

" 'But for one to defy many is up-hill work, and you without a protector now,' I said . . . 'Tell me the truth, Margaret,' I added, 'is Higgs dead?'

"She stood against the wall, eyeing the ground, and after a silence said with a shrug of her shoulders: 'Er *be* dead, I suppose—God knows; I don't.'

"Well, I was angry at this callous shrugging, and left her at once.

"The next Sunday she dared to come to church, and as I surmised that this would be resented, especially as she walked up the aisle with so haughty a toss of the head, I uttered in my sermon a few words as to the beauty of Christian forbearance. But it had no effect, and all up the back lane that leads steeply to Woodside, though it was a stormy afternoon, Margaret was followed by the congregation—most of them her cousins, and cousins of one another. They did not at first molest her, but uttered coughs, whistles, cat-calls; all which she endured without looking round, till by beck and signs they managed to induce her boy to leave her side and join the enemy, and thenceforth the walk became a cross-fire of abuse yelled from side to side, the woman hastening on in front afraid, with a grey face, but defiant eyes on fire, the people eagerly speeding upon her heels with no peaceable meaning.

" 'Go on!' she shouted to them, laughing with a rather ghastly grin of the mouth—'you gossiping, news-hunting lot! Shame ought to cover your face!'

" 'Where's Higgs?' they all roared at her.

" 'Go on, you! ignorant as wagon-horses, with your silly, foolhardy questions!'

"And so till they came to her house, where the crowd surrounded her; and now, finding herself at bay, her defiance suddenly failing, the woman broke into tears, and falling to her knees, called out upon the Almighty in passionate tones of reproach, saying 'What have I done, my good God? If I have done any wrong, send that my house may be burnt to the ground, may every evil befall me, may I be struck

paralysed from my crown to my foot—' a vow so apparently hearty, and so awful to the villagers that they went away and left her.

"But that night her house was burned to the ground.

"When the crowd had left her, she had flung herself upon a couch in the house, where she had remained in the grip of an ague till nine in the night; and getting up then to go to bed her still trembling hand had dropped the lamp . . .

"The news of that thing flew that night like loosened effluvia, and in a few minutes Woolaston was at Woodside. They found the boy, Fred Higgs, confined in the house by the fire, for in the first panic Margaret had run out, calling out to him, but he had been asleep, and now was screaming at his window, which was too little for him to squeeze through to leap to the ground. Seeing this, some of the crowd darted off to look for the orchard-ladder, when Margaret herself, to the awe of all, dived back into the fire, and presently appeared tearing at the framework of the boy's window, half of which was a fixture, and half a sideward slide. Well, as she as ever a person of great strength, the woodwork gave way to her tuggings, leaving space for the leap to the ground, and they came down safely.

"Fred Higgs was taken home by Price, the grocer; and Margaret, now all bald and baked on one side of the face, found a shelter in her stable with the body of her starved horse, which had died that day.

"But the woman's spirit was not yet broken. When, the next morning, Morgan, the policeman, called to invite her, things being as they were, to make a clean breast of what had happened to Higgs, she still sat dumb, rocking her body

to and fro. She seems to have entertained still the crazy hope of carrying on the farm on which she was born, but that same day Mr. Millings, Loreburn's land-steward, called to tell her that, of course, she must go now, offering, however, to give her a price for her implements, etc., which no one else would buy of her. These terms she had to accept; but she showed then as ever a fierce determination not to leave the place of her birth, and like a spider whose web has been torn, at once the woman set mutely to work to build up her life anew.

"On the third day after the fire she came with her face in bandages to my daughter, Nina, who owned a cottage high up there near the Chase; and though I felt bound to warn my daughter of the danger of letting, she chose to do so. On this the woman went away to Newport, bought there some new things, took her sow and fowls to her new abode, and was about once more to commence housekeeping. But it was not to be: for when all was ready, and she went down to Price, the grocer, who had taken in her boy, the boy roundly refused to go with her, saying to her: 'No mother, I don't want to see thee face never again.'

"These words seemed to strike the woman quite silly; and turning toward the crowd for pity, with a wry mouth that tried to smile, she let slip the words: 'Why, it was for him chiefly I did it!'

"Did it! You hear her? Did what?' cried some, while the rest of the boors booed and hissed her.

"'Come with your mother, hearty,' wooed the woman to the boy, 'don't be hard.'

"'Thee go away,' said the boy, emboldened by the mob,

'thee bisn't my own mother, nor I never did despise anybody so much as I do despise thee, never in all my life, and shame ought to cover thee face.'

"Margaret looked awe-struck at this last disaster. She said nothing more, but throwing her arm languidly at him was gone with lagging steps, as if broken down now, given over, cowed, and done for; nor from that day, I think, did she ever show any resistance to whatever was done to her, except once, when she threw a stone at a throng of boys who were pursuing her.

"Morgan, the policeman, however, and I also, thought that with regard to the boy, to whom from his youth the woman had ever been a good mother, a hardship had been done her; especially as without his help her new nook of land would be of little use to her. So after three weeks of talk the grocer formally agreed to give up the boy; and the same morning Morgan, happening to be passing up there, called to Margaret across her gate that her boy would be coming back to her at once. Upon this she seems to have run to stand under an ash tree at the end of the lane to see him coming up the hill; several persons, hurrying past in the rain, saw her standing there that day with her dress thrown over her head; and though the boy did not come for some hours, there she stood patiently on the look out, until the afternoon had become late and dark with storm. At last the boy came. But it was to find her lying helpless on her right side, apparently struck by lightning—the ash, at any rate, had been shivered, and she was found paralysed right down one side. Babbling with her blighted tongue, she begged the

boy to give her a hand, to try to get her home without uttering a word to anyone, but he, as if out of his wits, flew down the hill, howling out the news to the four winds.

"Well, however deep the woman's sin, what followed for her that evening is really shocking to recount, for a legion of fiends seem to have taken possession of the people to make a scene out of pandemonium on the mountain that evening. The words arose, 'drum her out'—for, of course, whatever doubt may have lingered in any mind with regard to Margaret's guilt was gone now, since all that her vow had called down upon herself was now fallen upon her; nor did the rain and darkness make any difference; with one accord the crowd started up the mountain. Happily, she guessed their approach, and in her terror, gathering whatever forces remained to her, she fled before them, managing to drag her frame into some bush before they reached the tree; while they, going on to her cottage to find her, and not finding her, threw all her new goods into a hurly-burly, and by accident or design burned to the ground my daughter's house. It was not till the next morning that Margaret was discovered lying in the field called the Morplepiece, and was then carried away by the police, to be put into the St. Bride's infirmary.

"There pressure was afresh brought to bear upon the woman to make some sort of confession, but she remained as dumb as ever; and after some months was sent out with that maimed drag in her gait and speech, which even now marks her. She dared again, though now penniless and hopeless of gaining a living here, to face the load of pain that awaited

her in her native place; and hereabouts, Heaven knows how, has continued to exist. My daughter Nina, whose heart has always deeply grieved for her, sometimes of an angry night will say to me: 'That poor Margaret Higgs, papa; perhaps out on the Chase in it all.' Aye, and I have known her go out with a groom and a lantern to look for the woman, and on discovering her under one of those two-arched kilns which are common in this part, has wooed the poor soul to come home with her. Margaret when dragged has come, but always before morning was gone again. Indeed, she had soon become much of a wild woman, imbued with the mood of storm-winds and dark nights, as shy and gloomy-eyed as those shaggy nags on the Chase, her only mates, whose manes and great tails the gales up there ever fret; so that belated yokels on their way home have often paused to hearken to some moan or laugh of hers in the dark. Once she was sent to prison, when, ever unlucky, on happening to throw a stone at a throng of boys, the stone cut one of them, and the magistrates gave her their 'go to Gloucester for a month.' One of these magistrates, by the way, was none other than her stepson, Fred Higgs, who had been taken up by some mysterious business man—in Glasgow they say it was—had graduated at Oxford, and is now, you may say, one of our magnates. The man has simply ignored his stepmother's existence.

"However, the new proprietor of Glanna has given orders that the woman be housed, and provided with the means of a livelihood—has let it be understood, too, that whoever injures her will incur his displeasure. In fact, during the few

weeks that this Mr. Ogden has been in residence his goodness to the poor has become the talk, though he seems something of a queer sort, and almost a hermit. At any rate, through him, the condition of Margaret may shortly be expected to undergo a change, though it is not easy to rescue her—she resists, appears to be suspicious, can't now believe perhaps that anyone really wishes her well—and whether she is capable of being reclaimed from her half-savage state it is hard to say: for the years alter us all, sir, the years leave the marks of their passing upon us."

So much Mr. Somerset, the aged clergyman, was able to give me of the story of Margaret Higgs, and that morose star of hers; and two days later I learned in further detail that every effort was being made to tame and help her.

But the bad destiny that seemed to have the woman in hand was not even yet done with her. Her new abode was actually ready for her, and she had agreed to go into it, glad, I suppose, poor soul, of a bed at last, when some men, digging for a foundation down by Severn, found the remains of a man.

It was near the spot where the daft Felix over fifteen years before had seen Margaret Higgs with a body on her back one dark morning, and the cry arose, "the body of Higgs at last."

Again, then, was Margaret taken to prison; and I, hearing of all the to-do, took train to St. Bride's to witness her trial in the petty sessions there.

Of the two justices one was her own stepson, Fred Higgs, a good-looking man of not much more than thirty, and the

other, the new lord of the Manor of Glanna.

As to the woman herself, she sat through it all—she was too woefully weak to stand—in a spiritless attitude, as unmoving as a statue. It was understood that, on being pressed in prison, she had admitted that the body discovered was that of her husband, buried by her; to which admission one Inspector Jonas deposed, and spoke as to the enforcing of the Coroner's warrant, and the whole story of the horror.

But what struck me from the first was the nervousness of one of the justices, the lord of Glanna—a short-built and broad-faced man, with cropped hair, and squat fingers, with which he kept tapping on his chin, tapping on his chair, tapping ever on everything near him.

And presently his keenness to procure the release of the accused became quite clear, till it was painful. One never saw a judge so jumpy in his chair, so agitated, so impatient of opposition. When his brother justice once leaned toward him, perhaps to whisper some remonstrance, Mr. Ogden cried out loudly: "You be sure to shut your mouth!" and I then noticed that the very slight rocking of Margaret Higgs's body, which was going on as regularly as a pendulum's swing, suddenly ceased, and the woman seemed to start and hearken.

Evidence, however, is evidence, and no magistrate could have saved the woman from the County assizes, had it not been that at the last, when the prosecution was summing-up, saying, "there can be no doubt therefore that the remains now found are actually those of Barnaby Higgs—" Mr. Ogden at those words leaped from his chair, calling out:

"But how can all that be so certain to you, sir, when here's Barnaby Higgs himself, a living man, talking to ye?"

The hand which the old man spread before us shivered with strong emotion, while tears blinded his eyes. I heard Mr. Somerset, seated near me on the bench, twice breathe to himself: "*My God!*" The mass of rags in the dock sprang straight with a crazy stare. Throughout the crowded room hardly a sound was heard till Mr. Higgs, stepping to the rail, spoke—with a most painful agitation at the beginning, but presently more calmly and then again with wrathful agitation when, turning upon Fred Higgs, he scourged his son with invective. And ever afresh at the object of sorrow and rags arraigned before him he stretched his forefinger, with red-veined eyes, and a moan of love in his choked throat, calling her blessed, calling her saint.

It was the same Barnaby Higgs, he told the court—was rather surprised that some of them hadn't recognised him—only sixteen years older now, and a big-wig, in a frock-coat, and without a beard, but the same.

One summer there had come to the farm a man named John Cheyne—a sailorman he was—a cousin, who had got into trouble for abducting a girl, and Higgs had hidden him.

But the chap had not been three days on the place when Higgs began to be jealous.

"Though she told me that there was nothing in it, I didn't believe her, nor I don't now believe her, for I distinctly saw John Cheyne kissing, or trying to kiss, her behind the sty; and that same day, between three-thirty and four by the clock, I turned the fellow off the place."

The sailor took his departure, but by ten in the night was back at the farm, craving to be again taken in; this Higgs refused. Cheyne pushed himself in, hot words arose, then fisticuffs, during which Cheyne, who must have had heart-disease, "dropped down dead before a right-handed cross-counter in the left ribs, after a lead-off with the left by himself." Some moments afterwards, Margaret, who had been out "at fair," walked in and saw what that was which Higgs was crouched down over on the floor.

Higgs, in the crowd of his terrors, knowing that his row with the sailor was known, could foresee nothing but the gallows; but Margaret, after sitting like a stone a long time, proposed flight, she to bury the body down by Severn, and in three nights' time to meet Higgs secretly on the Chase, to let him know whether he might safely return home.

This was agreed. Higgs ran, Margaret buried the sailor—no one suspected that he was dead, but as to the rendezvous on the Chase on the third day Higgs, ever nervous, had shirked it. Terrified by the tidings heard in his hiding that Margaret had been seen carrying a body on her back, he had not dared to return into the region of danger, but, having reached Liverpool, took ship.

"Yes," he said from the bench, "I abandoned her, little thinking that she'd be seriously charged with killing *me*, who knew myself to be alive and hearty, and all the time I was in South Africa I was that shy and sick of my cowardice I couldn't write to her; I preferred she should think me dead and gone. But I didn't know, I made sure she'd be going on all right in the old style. . . . Hadn't I left one to protect her,

friends? Didn't I get a business friend in Glasgow to adopt him? He did nothing for her. My own son—this man—he did nothing for her. Ah! the squalls that caught her and the frosts that froze her bones were never a bit so hard on her as this bitter heart. It was for him she did it, friends, just think! She said to me that night, for she was cross wi' me, 'it's not to screen *thee*, I do it,' she said, 'so I tell thee straight; but what kind of a life will it be for Fred with everybody having it to say he be a murderer's son?' And she kept the truth dark from him and from all—how long? For two months? For ten? While he was a dutiful boy to her? No, sixteen solid years down to this hour, though he was a beast to her. Why, sirs, talking of Christianity, there stands a Christian for you, I think? And you—you, couldn't you do some little something for her who did so much for you? Were you really bound to send her to Gloucester? And when you saw that her own husband had coward-like abandoned her, and all the crowd of them was hounding her, and the Almighty God on high Himself that ought to have been her Father was all dead agen her, and she stood dumb and astonished, was that the moment for you, too, Fred, hard heart . . . ? For if only from this confession she has made that she did kill me, I can pretty well judge what she's been through; she has confessed because, when she'd once tasted her prison cell that's proved a palace of rest to her after her kilns, and her brackens, and her barns, and her storms, she was afraid of being set free, maybe, if she didn't confess; or maybe she was too aweary to trouble to say no to aught they asked her. Oh, well, poor wounded woman, you've had it to

do, haven't you, poor mute ewe, with all your wounds and bruises on you; but a bosom is here at last to guard you, Margaret Higgs, like the morning to a murky night, and the turning to a long lane, aye, a bosom is here to guard you . . . The prisoner is discharged! Officer, I give myself in charge for the manslaughter of one John Cheyne."

It was now that the woman, babbling something, put out both her hands one moment toward her husband, but in the very act failed and fell. She was raised and taken out, and I, rushing out with the rest just behind her husband, witnessed everything that was done in vain to revive her, and the raver's frenzied vain prayers to his dead.

The Bride

"He shall not see the rivers, the floods,
the brooks of honey and butter."

— JOB

THEY met at Krupp and Mason's, musical-instrument-makers, of Little Britain, E. C., where Walter had been employed two years, and then came Annie to typewrite, and be serviceable. They began to "go out" together after six o'clock; and when Mrs. Evans, Annie's mamma, lost her lodger, Annie mentioned it, and Walter went to live with them at No. 13 Culford Road, N.; by which time Annie and Walter might almost be said to have been engaged. His salary, however, was only thirty shillings a week.

He was the thorough Cockney, Walter; a well-set-up person of thirty, strong-shouldered, with a square brow, a moustache, and black acne-specks in his nose and pale face.

It was on the night of his arrival at No. 13, that he for the first time saw Rachel, Annie's younger sister. Both girls, in fact, were named "Rachel"—after a much-mourned mother of Mrs. Evans'; but Annie Rachel was called "Annie," and Mary Rachel was called "Rachel." Rachel helped Walter at the handle of his box to the top-back room, and here, in the lamplight, he was able to see that she was a tallish girl, with hair almost black, and with a sprinkling of

freckles on her very white, thin nose, on the tip of which stood collected, usually, some little sweats. She was thin-faced, and her top teeth projected a little so that her lips only closed with effort, she not so pretty as pink-and-white little Annie, though one could guess, at a glance, that she was a person more to be respected.

"What do you think of him?" said Annie, meeting Rachel as she came down.

"He seems a nice fellow," Rachel said: "rather good-looking. And strong in the back, you bet."

Walter spent that evening with them in the area front-room, smoking a foul bulldog pipe, which slushed and gurgled to his suction; and at once Mrs. Evans, a dark old lady without waist, all sighs and lack of breath, decided that he was "a gentlemanly, decent fellow." When bedtime came he made the proposal to lead them in prayer; and to this they submitted, Annie having forewarned them that he was "a Christian." As he climbed to his room, the devoted girl found an excuse to slip out after him, and in the passage of the first floor there was a little kiss.

"Only one," she said, with an uplifted finger.

"And what about his little brother, then?" he chuckled—a chuckle with which all his jokes were accompanied: a kind of guttural chuckle, which seemed to descend or stick straining in the throat, instead of rising to the lips.

"You go on," she said playfully, tapped his cheek, and ran down. So Walter slept for the first night at Mrs. Evans'.

On the whole, as time passed, he had a good deal of the society of the women: for the theatre was a thing abominable to him, and in the evenings he stayed in the underground

parlour, sharing the bread-and-cheese supper, and growing familiar with the sighs of Mrs. Evans over her once estate in the world. Rachel, the silent, sewed; Annie, whose relation with Walter was still unannounced, though perhaps guessed, could play hymn-tunes on the old piano, and she played. Last of all, Walter laid down the inveterate wet pipe, led them in prayer, and went to bed. Most mornings he and Annie set out together for Little Britain.

There came a day when he confided to her his intention to ask for a rise of "screw," and when this was actually promised by His Terror, the Boss, there was joy in heaven, and radiance in futurity, and secret talks of rings, a wedding, "a Home." Annie felt herself not far from the kingdom of Hymen, and rejoiced. But nothing, as yet, was said at No. 13: for to Mrs. Evans' past grandeurs thirty shillings a week was felt to be inappropriate.

The next Sunday, however, soon after dinner, this strangeness occurred: Rachel, the silent, disappeared. Mrs. Evans called for her, Annie called, but it was found that she was not in the house, though the putting away of the dinner-things, her usual task, was only half accomplished. Not till tea-time did Rachel return. She was then cold, and somewhat sullen, and somewhat pale, her lips closing firmly over her projecting teeth. When timidly questioned—for her resentment was greatly feared—she replied that she had just been looking in upon Alice Soulsby, a few squares away, for a little chat: and this was the truth.

It was not, however, the whole truth; she had also looked in at the Church Lane Sunday School on her way: and this fact she guiltily concealed. For half an hour she had sat

darkly at the end of the building in a corner, listening to the "address." This address was delivered by Walter. To this school every Sunday, after dinner, he put down the beloved pipe to go. He was, in fact, its "superintendent."

After this, the tone and temper of the little household rapidly changed, and a true element of hell was introduced into its platitude. It became, first of all, a question whether or not Rachel could be "experiencing religion," a thing which her mother and Annie had never dreamt of expecting of her. Praying people, and the Salvationist, had always been the contempt of her strong and callous mind. But on Sunday nights she was now observed to go out alone, and "chapel" was the explanation which she coolly gave. *Which* chapel she did not specify: but, in reality, it was the Newton Street Hall, at which Walter frequently exhorted and "prayed." In the Church Lane school-room there was prayer-meeting on Thursday evenings; and twice within one month Rachel sallied forth on Thursday evening—soon after Walter. The secret disease which preyed upon the poor girl could hardly now be concealed. At first she suffered bitter, solitary shame; sobbed in a hundred paroxysms; hoped to draw a veil over her infirmity. But her gash was too glaring. In the long Sabbath evenings of summer he preached at street corners, and sometimes secretly, sometimes openly, Rachel would attend these meetings, singing meekly with the rest of the undivine hymns of the modern evangelist. In his presence, in the parlour, on other nights, she quietly sewed, hardly speaking. When, at seven p.m., she heard his key in the front door her heart darted toward its master; when in the morning he flew away to business her universe was cinders.

"It's a wonder to me what's coming to our Rachel lately," said Annie in the train, coming home; "you're doing her soul good, or something, aren't you?"

He chuckled, with slushy suction-sounds about the back of the tongue and molars.

"Oh, that be jiggered for a tale!" he said "*she's* all right."

"I know her better than you, you see. She's quite changed—since you've come. Looks to me as if she's having a touch of the blues, or something."

"Poor thing! She wants looking after, don't she?"

Annie laughed, too: but less brutally, more uneasily.

Walter said: "But she *oughtn't* to have the blues, if she's giving her heart to the Lord! People seem to think a Christian must be this and that. A Christian, if it comes to that, ought to be the jolliest fellow going!"

This was on a Thursday, the night of the Church Lane prayer-meeting, and Walter had only time to rush in at No. 13, wash his face, snatch his Bible, and be off. Rachel, for her part, must verily now have been badly bitten with the rabies of love, or she would have felt that to follow tonight, for the third time lately, could not fail to incur remark. But this consideration never even entered a mind now completely blinded and entranced by the personality of Walter. Through the day her work about the house had been rushed forward with this very object, and at the moment when he banged the door after him she was before her glass, dressing in blanched, intense and trembling flurry, and casting, as she bent to give the last touches to her fringe, a look of bitterest hate at the projection of her lip above the teeth.

This night, for the first time, she waited in the chapel till

the end of the service, and walked slowly homeward on the way which she knew that Walter would take; and he came striding presently, that morocco Bible in his hand, nearly every passage in which was neatly under-ruled in black and red inks.

"What, is that you?" he said, taking into his a hand cold with sweat.

"It is," she answered, in a hard, formal tone.

"You don't mean to say you've been to the meeting?"

"I do."

"Why, where were my eyes? *I* didn't see you."

"It isn't likely that you would want to, Mr. Teeger."

"Go on—drop that! What do you take me for? I'm only too glad! And I tell you what it is, Miss Rachel, I say to you as the Lord Jesus said to the young man: 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven.' "

She was *in* it!—near him, alone, in a darkling square, yet suffering, too, in the flames of a passion such as perhaps consumes only the strongest natures.

She caught for support at his unoffered arm; and when he bent his steps straight homeward, she said, trembling violently: "I don't wish to go home as yet. I wish to have a little walk. Do you mind, Mr. Teeger?"

"Mind, no. Come along, then," and they went walking among an intricacy of streets and squares, he talking of "the Work," and of common subjects. After half an hour, she was saying: "I often wish I was a man. A man can say and do what he likes; but with a girl it's different. There's you, now, Mr. Teeger, always out and about, having people listening to you, and that. I often wish I was only a man."

"Oh, well, it all depends how you look at it," he said. "And, look here, you may as well call me Walter and be done."

"Oh, I shouldn't think of *that*," she replied. "Not till—" Her hand trembled on his arm.

"Well, out with it, why don't you?"

"Till—till we know something more definite about you—and Annie."

He chuckled slushily, she now leading him fleetly round and round a square.

"Ah, you girls again!" he cried, "been blabbing again like all the girls! It takes a bright man to hide much from them, don't it?"

"But there isn't much to hide in this case, as far as I can see—is there?"

Always Walter laughed, straining deep in the throat. He said: "Oh, come—that would be telling, wouldn't it?"

After a minute's stillness, this treacherous phrase came from Rachel: "Annie doesn't care for anyone, Mr. Teeger."

"Oh, come—that's rather a tall order, *any* one. *She's* all right."

"But she *doesn't*. Of course, most girls are silly, and that, and like to get married—"

"Well, that's only nature, ain't it?"

This was a joke; and downward the laugh strained in his throat, like struggling phlegm.

"Yes, but they don't understand what love is," said Rachel. "They haven't an idea. They like to be married women, and have a husband, and that. But they don't know what love is—believe me! The men don't either."

How she trembled!—her body, her dying voice—she pressing heavily upon him, while the moon triumphed now through cloud glaring a moment white on the lunacy of her ghostly face.

"Well, I don't know—I think *I* understand, lass, what it is," he said.

"You don't, Mr. Teeger!"

"How's that, then?"

"Because, when it takes you, it makes you—"

"Well, let's have it. You seem to know all about it."

Now Rachel commenced to tell him what "it" was—in frenzied definitions, and a power of expression strange for her. *It* was a lunacy, its name was Legion, it was possession by the furies; it was a spasm in the throat, and a sickness of the limbs, and a yearning of the eye-whites, and a fire in the marrow; it was catalepsy, trance, apocalypse; it was high as the galaxy, it was addicted to the gutter; it was Vesuvius, borealis, the sunset; it was the rainbow in a cesspool, St. John plus Heliogabalus, Beatrice plus Messalina; it was a transfiguration, and a leprosy, and a metempsychosis, and a neurosis; it was the dance of the maenads, and the bite of the tarantula, and baptism in a sun: out poured the wild definition in simple words, but with the strife of one fighting for life. And she had not half done when he understood her fully; and he had no sooner understood her, than he was subdued, and succumbed.

"You don't mean to say—" he faltered.

"Ah, Mr. Teeger," she answered, "there's none so blind as those who will not see."

His arm stole round her shuddering body.

Everyone is said to have his failing; and this man, Walter, in no respect a man of strong mind, was certainly on his amatory side, most sudden, promiscuous, and infirm. And this tendency was, if anything, heightened by the quite sincere strain of his mind in the direction of "spiritual things": for, under sudden temptation, back rushed his being, with the greater rigour, into its natural channel. On the whole, had he not been a Puritan, he would have been a Don Juan.

In an instant Rachel's weight was hanging upon his neck, he kissing her with passion.

After this she said to him: "But you are only doing this out of pity, Walter. Tell the truth, you are in love with Annie?"

He, like Peter, tumbled at once into a fib. "That's what *you* say!"

"You are," she insisted, filled with the bliss of the fib.

"Bah! I'm not. Never was. *You* are the girl for me."

When they went home, they entered the house at different times, she first, he waiting twenty minutes in the street.

The house was small, so the sisters slept together in the second-floor front room; Walter in the second-floor back; Mrs. Evans in the first-floor back, the first-floor front being "the drawing-room." The girls, therefore, generally went to bed together: and that night, as they undressed, there was a row.

First, a long silence. Then Rachel, to say something, pointed to some new gloves of Annie's, asking: "How much did you give for those?"

"Money and kind words," replied Annie.

This was the beginning.

"Well, there's no need to be rude about it," said Rachel. She was happy, in paradise, despised Annie that night.

"Still," said Annie, after a silence of ten minutes before the glass, "*still*, I should never run after a man like that. I'd die first."

"I haven't the least idea what you're talking about," replied Rachel.

"You have. I should be *ashamed* of myself, if I were you."

"Talk away. You're a little fool."

"It's you. Throwing yourself at the head of a man who doesn't care for you. What *can* you call yourself?"

Rachel laughed—happily, yet dangerously.

"Don't bother yourself, my girl," she said.

"Think of going out every night to meet a man in that way: look here, it's too disgusting of you, girl!"

"Is it?"

"You can't deny that you were with Mr. Teeger to-night?"

"That I wasn't."

"It's false! Anyone can see it by the joy in your face."

"Well, suppose I was, what about it?"

"But a woman should be decent, I think; a woman should be able to command her feelings, and not expose herself like that. Believe me, it gives me the creeps all over to think of."

"Never mind, don't be jealous, my girl."

The gentle Annie flamed!

"Jealous! of *you*!"

"There isn't any need, you know—not *yet*."

"But I'm *not*! There never *will* be need! Do you take Mr. Teeger for a raving lunatic? I should go and have some false teeth put in first if I were you!"

Thus did Annie drop to the rock-bed of vulgarity; but she knew it to be necessary in order to touch Rachel, as with a white-hot wire, on her very nerve of anguish, and, in fact, at these words Rachel's face resembled white iron, while she cried out, "Never mind my teeth! It isn't the teeth a man looks at! A man knows a finely built woman when he sees her—not like a little dumpy podge!"

"Thank you. You are very polite," replied Annie, brow-beaten by an intensity fiercer than her own. "But still, it's nonsense, Rachel, to talk of my being jealous of *you*. I knew Mr. Teeger six months before you. And you won't know him much longer either, for I don't want to have mother disgraced here, and this is no fit place for him to lodge in. I can easily make him leave it soon—"

At this thing Rachel flew, with minatory palm over Annie's cheek, ready to strike "You *dare* do anything to make him go away! I'll tear your little—"

Annie winked, flinched, uttered a sob, no more fight left in her.

So for two weeks the situation lasted. Only, after that night, so intense grew the bitterness between the sisters, that Annie moved down to the first-floor back, sleeping now with Mrs. Evans who dimly wondered. As for Walter, meanwhile, his heart was divided within him. He loved Annie; he was fascinated and mesmerised by Rachel. In another age and country he would have married both. Every day he came to a different resolve, not knowing what to do. One thing was evident—a wedding-ring would be necessary, and he purchased one, uncertain for which of the girls.

"Look here, lass," he said to Annie in the train, coming

home, "let us put a stop to this. The boss doesn't seem to be in a hurry about that rise of screw, so suppose we get spliced, and be done?"

"Privately?"

"Rather. Your ma and sister mustn't know,—not just yet a while."

"And you will still keep on living at the house?"

"Well, of course, for the time being."

She looked up into his face and smiled. It was settled.

But two nights afterwards he met Rachel on his way home from prayer-meeting; at first was honest and distant; but then committed the incredible weakness of going with her for a walk among the squares, and ended by winning from her an easily granted promise of marriage, on the same terms as those arranged with Annie.

When, the next day at lunch-time, he put his foot on the threshold of the Registrar's office to give notice, he was still in a state of agonised indecision as to the name which he should couple with his own.

When the official said, "Now the name of the other party?" Walter hesitated, shuffled with his feet, then answered:

"Rachel Evans."

Not till he was again in the street did he remember that Rachel was the name of both the girls, and that liberty of choice between them still remained to him.

Now, from the day of "notice" to the day of wedlock an interval of twenty-one clear days must, by law, elapse, and Walter, though weak enough to inform both the sisters of the step he had taken, was careful to give them only a vague

idea of the date fixed. His once clear conscience, meanwhile, was grievously troubled, his feet in a net; he feared to look within himself; he feared to speak to God; and went drifting like flotsam on the river of chance.

And chance alone it was which at last cast him upon the land. The fifth day before the marriage was a Bank Holiday, and he had arranged with Rachel to go out with her that day to Hyde Park, she to wait for him at an arranged spot at two o'clock. At two, then, at a street-corner, stood Rachel waiting, twirling her parasol, walking a little, returning. Walter, however, did not appear, and what could have happened was beyond her divination. Had he misunderstood or missed her? Though incredible, it was the only thing to think. To Hyde Park, at any rate, she went alone, feeling desolate and *ennuyée*, in the vague hope of there meeting him.

What had happened was this: Walter had been half-way toward the rendezvous with Rachel, when he was met in the street by Annie, who had gone to spend the day with a married friend at Stroud Green, but had returned, owing to the husband's illness. Seeing Walter, her face lit up with smiles.

"Harry's down with the influenza," she said, "so I couldn't stay and bore poor Ethel. Where are you going?"

For the first time since his "conversion" twelve years before, Walter, with a high flush, now consciously lied.

"Only to the schoolroom," he said, "to hunt for something."

"Well, I am open to be taken out, if any kind friend will be so kind," she said fondly.

Now, he had that morning vowed to himself to wed

Rachel; and by this vow he now again vowed to be bound. All the more reason why, for the last time, he should "take out" Annie.

"Come along, then, old girl," he gaily said: "where shall we go?"

"Let us go to Hyde Park," said Annie. And to Hyde Park they went, Walter, ever and anon, stabbed by the bitter memory of waiting Rachel.

At five o'clock the two were walking along the north bank of the Serpentine westward toward a two-arched bridge, which is also pierced by a third narrow arch over the bank: to this narrow arch, since it was drizzling, they were making for shelter, when Rachel, a person of the keenest vision, sighted them from the south bank. She was frantic at once. Annie, who was supposed to be at Stroud Green! *What treachery!* This, then, was why . . . She ran panting along the bank, toward the bridge, then over it, northward, and now heard the two under the arch, who stood there talking—of the wedding. Unfortunately, just here is a block of masonry, which prevented Rachel from leaning directly over the arch to listen. Yet the necessity to hear was absolute: so she ran back clear of the masonry, and bent far over the parapet, outwards and sideways toward the arch, straining neck, body, ears, and anyone looking into those staring eyes *then* would have comprehended the doctrine of the Ferine Soul. But she was at a disadvantage, heard only murmurs, and—was that a kiss? Further and further forth she strained. And now suddenly, with a cry, she is in the water, where it is shallow near the bank. In the fall her head struck upon a stone in the mud.

For three days she screamed continuously the name of Walter, filling the street with it, calling him hers only. On the third night, in the midst of a frightful crisis of cries, she suddenly died.

"Oh, Rachel, don't say you are dead!" cried Annie over her.

The death occurred two days before the marriage-day, and on the next, Walter, well wounded, said to Annie: "This knocks our little affair on the head, of course."

Annie was silent. Then, with a pout, she said: "I don't see why. After all, it was her own fault entirely. Why should *we* suffer?"

For the feud between the sisters had become cruel as death; and it outlasted death: Annie, on the subject of Rachel and Walter, being no longer a gentle girl, but marble, without respect or pity.

And so, in spite of the trepidations and hesitancy of Walter, the marriage took place, even while Rachel lay stretched on the bed in the second-floor front of No. 13.

The ceremony did not, however, transpire without hitch and omen. It was necessary, first of all, for Walter to forewarn Annie that he had given notice of her to the Registrar by her second name of "Rachel"—a mad-looking proceeding that was almost the cause of a rupture which nothing but Walter's most ardent pleadings could steer him clear of. At any rate it was to "Rachel," and not to "Annie" that he was, as a matter of fact, after all married.

After the ceremony, performed in their lunch-time, they returned to business together in Little Britain.

At ten o'clock the same night, as he was going up to bed,

she ran after him, and in the passage there was a long, furtive kiss—their last on earth.

"Twelve o'clock?" he whispered intensely.

She held up her forefinger. "One!"

"Oh, say twelve!"

She did not answer, but drew her palm playfully across his cheek, meaning consent, for Mrs. Evans was an inveterately heavy sleeper. He went up. And, careful to leave his door a little ajar, he extinguished his candle, and went to bed. In the apartment near by lay stark in the dark—with learned, eternal eyelids and drowsy brow—the dead.

Walter could not but think of this presence close at hand. "Well, poor girl!" he sighed. "Poor Rachel! Well, well. His way is in the sea, after all, and His path in the Great Deep, and His footsteps are not known." Then he thought of Annie—the little wife! But instead of Annie, there was Rachel. The two women fought vehemently for his thought—and ever the dead was stronger than the living. . . . Instead of Annie there was Rachel—and again Rachel.

At last he could hear twelve strike from a steeple, and sat up in bed, listening eagerly for the door to open, or a footfall on the floor.

A little American clock ticked in the room; and in the flue of the chimney was a sigh and chaunt just audible.

Suddenly she was intensely with him, filling the chamber—from nowhere. He had heard no footsteps, no opening of the door: yet certainly, she was with him *now*, all suddenly, close to him, over him, talking breathlessly to him.

His first sensation was a shuddering which strongly shook him from head to foot, like the shuddering of Russian cold.

She held him down by the shoulders; was stretched at length on the bed, over him; and the room seemed full of a rustling and rushing, very strange, like starched muslins rushing out in stormy agitation. She was speaking, too, to him, *in breathless haste*, whimpering a secret gibberish which whimpered like a pup for passion—about love and its definition, and about the soul, and the worm, and Eternity, and the passion of death, and the nuptials of the tomb, and the lust and hollowness of the void. And he, too, was speaking, whispering through his pattering teeth, saying: "Sh-h-h, Rachel—Annie, I mean—sh-h-h, my girl—your ma will hear! Rachel, don't—sh-h-h, now!" But even while he kept up this "sh-h-h, dear—sh-h-h, now," he was conscious of the invasion of a strange rage, of such a strength as if energy was being vehemently pumped into him from some behemoth omnipotence. The form above him he could hardly discern, the room was so dark, but he felt that her garment was flowing forth from her neck in a continuous flutter, with the rustling of the starch of a thousand shrouds, like the outflow of a pennant in wind; and the quivering gauze seemed now to swell and fill the chamber, and now to sink again to the size of woman. And ever the rhapsody of love and death went on, mixed with the chattered "Sh-h-h, Rachel—Annie, I mean," of Walter; till, suddenly, he was involved in an embrace so horrible, felt himself encompassed by a might so intolerable, that his soul fainted within him. He sank back; thought span and failed in darkness beneath the spell of that lullaby; he muttered, "Receive my spirit. . . ."

After two days Walter, still unconscious, died. His disfigured body they placed in a grave not far from Rachel's.

The Tale of Henry and Rowena

THE lady Rowena Howard of Iste had been ten months married, when—*again*—she was thrown across the path of Lord Darnley.

It was at the Palli Opera-house, where her opera-glass, in moving along the opposite row of "Nobility Boxes", lighted upon that livid face and square forehead of Darnley, to find *his* glass, too, fixed upon her; and the mutual gaze of glasses endured some seconds, till she, suddenly paling, slightly inclined her head.

When she was moving out from the play a man costumed as a Polar bear (Darnley's secretary) contrived to drop into her parasol a card which bore the words, "May we meet? at the Meta Sudana"—it being then near 8 p.m., the hour when the Lenten Bell would sound the closing of the theatres, open since 10 a.m., that day being the Tuesday, the last—the maddest—day of Carnival, the day of the barberi and the moccoletti: and the cry of it was rising to the skies. For now the city had become one dizziness, its air dim with missiles, vehicles from bye-street wending into the Corso filled with dominoes, pierrots, "marquises", contadini—a chaos of plying arms, screams, contests, colours.

But Rowena lay back in her carriage, taking no part in this campaign—a lady of a large and languorous make, her thick lips scarlet against her paleness, her globe of coal-black hair, and her throat's curve, giving her a certain resemblance to those beings of Rossetti's dreams. It had been remarked of Darnley standing near her that he was the shorter by an inch.

When her carriage had rolled along the Via Urbana to the Colosseum, Lord Darnley stepped to her from the shadow of the trysting-place.

"You see, we meet," he said.

And she murmured: "It is strange."

They moved to the mouth of a vomitorium, whence the ruin rolled in gloom before them.

"You are still everywhere, then?" she said smiling.

He replied: "I travel. Although we are souls that have sinned elsewhere, and the earth is our place of internment, happily we may pace in it."

"Ah, that black mood . . . You promised to be happy, Henry."

"Are you?"

"I am lately married to an old man—who talks of consols and stocks. Still, there are consolations."

"What are the consolations?"

"Wealth, the sun, the Carnival."

"After the Carnival, Lent," he mentioned.

"But before Lent, the Carnival!" she laughed shortly.

And he: "This is a new worldliness in you. The—husband's influence?"

"May-be."

"No, forgive me: I know that you cannot be other than yourself."

"I hope that I am all that you see in me. One, though, is not necessarily the equal of one's face. The most ethereal beauty whom I have seen is a cigarette-maker at Seville, who is weak in her head."

"I have never estimated you by your face," Darnley said, dwelling on that face with lowered lids, "but by myself: you are my double—or you used to be."

Her eyes dropped embarrassed at the flattery. "Well, if you say so . . . I—hope—it is true. *You* produce the impression more of some Olympian being than of man; as for me, I begin to fear that I am—much of a woman."

"The 'Olympian beings' are surely exempt from diseases of the skin," he answered smiling.

(Five years previously, on the eve of his projected wedding with Rowena, he had spent three nights in Iceland, the residence of leprosy, and presently three of the nodules of that disease had appeared upon Darnley's left arm, making him a pariah.)

"Not well yet?" she asked.

And he answered: "My disease is incurable."

"Alas! and mine, Henry"—with more of melancholy perhaps than was felt.

"I am here to cure you and me."

She looked at him dubiously by a moon that had just moved up, doubling the hugeness of the ruin, touching Rowena with a hand of romance and magic.

"And the cure is—the old cure?" she demanded, smiling: "the *rendezvous* in Nowhere?"

"Where souls really meet," he said.

She stood thoughtful some moments, hearkening to the vortex of the Carnival noising afar, hardly audible here.

"And you believe *still*, Henry, in the soul, the Hereafter?"

"There is the soul, the Hereafter. Do you not believe?"

"Yes, if you tell me so."

"I tell you so. I have known it for seven years. And *there* is cure."

"Tempter, tempter."

He, all the time, was playing in a pocket with two vials that hardly ever left his person; and now he said: "You consent?"

"Henry, I—have ties . . ."

"Possibly you no longer—love."

"Ah!"

"You consent, then. At midnight, say?"

"Oh, no, I—At least give one time."

"How much?"

"A month."

"Where?"

"At Naples."

He bowed. "In a month, then—at Naples."

"Anyway, I shall be definite then."

He bowed. And now they traversed the vomitorium to part at the Meta Sudana.

By now the *moccoletti fête* was at full flood a hundred thousand tapers rushing, raging, tossed in throng of battle, flushing faces on the balconies of fourth-stories, everyone bent upon safeguarding his own, upon puffing out some other's *moccoletto*, with bellows, extinguishers, extravagant

fans . . . Suddenly the Lenten Bell put out every taper; but like dead champagne the throng remained, and it was long before Rowena's coachman, filching his steps with petty thefts among the thick of vehicles moving homeward, landed her at her palazzo, where a rather cold note from her husband told her that he had started out alone for the function which was to close the social carnival—the *bal masqué* at the Rondola Palace.

The Duca di Rondola (the same "Rondola" who was the naturalist, and had made his park into the famous "Rondola Zoo"), was that year the chief of Roman entertainers; and on this final night of all his halls were thronged.

There at midnight Rowena was: she was then dancing; but presently afterwards, to escape the press of the apartments, descended into the park. Her quest of dreaminess was not, however, immediately successful, for among flower-beds and bowers she encountered a multitude of couples, seated in cosiness or strolling, so that she penetrated ever farther into the heart of the park, until at a very shadowed part she remarked, coming toward her, a masked man of middle stature with a crimson calpac, a cashmere sash: on recognising his negro moustache, and that flashy gleam of his teeth, Rowena started . . .

She breathed "*You*" at their meeting: "I had no idea that you were here . . ." looking at him with a sort of awe, this *second* encounter producing upon her fantasy the impression that it had been brought about by his absolute power of personality and will to influence happenings; and she said: "Certainly, *this* meeting is singular: I came out seeking a dream—"

"I intrude—"

"Ah, no: so Saul, who sought his father's asses, found, Henry, a kingdom."

"A kingdom and a tragedy."

"Oh, man of the black mood. But better to die a king than live a peasant, is it not?"—this with her head held sideward, smiling a fond cajolery.

And he: "Or to die a 'goddess' than live 'a woman'?"

"Tempter, tempter."

"I asked a question."

"I have answered! 'At Naples, in a month' "—though, if she looked well into herself, she might have discovered that her reply in a month would not widely differ from her reply that night; but the time and place were full of fays and flutes, a moonshine suffusing those shades with a mood of dreams, and Rowena returned ever, with a secret unease, to the subject, flirting, playing with such edged tools with a mysticism, and a melancholy, half infantile, wholly feminine.

"Yet we meet always!" she said: "what is it makes us meet?"

"In physics," he replied, "there are atoms that find each other—cannot be kept apart. So in the region of spirit."

"We are, then, altogether the creatures of Law?"

"Atoms are chemically impelled; spirits yield to the promptings of Fate."

"So that our meeting now, for instance—"

"Stay," he said, pointing, "*there* may be the reason for it..."

This happened in an avenue of line-trunks standing behind sarsaparilla-hedges, the avenue being an incline, ending

a little above the lovers in a kiosk that stood under a wall; and it was down the hill that Darnley, in saying "*there*", pointed—at an object a longish distance off toward the bottom, where two Moorish lanterns made it visible: some dappled animal that with gracile gambolings was rambling up the avenue—toward them.

Rowena's eyes fastened, widening, upon this apparition; she whispered: "What *is* it?"

"A Tsana panther . . ."

"Escaped?"

"Evidently. These woods, you know, are full of specimens—"

"But—it is approaching us!"

"Not alarmed? 'Una lonza leggiera e presta molto, che di pel mac—' "

"Henry!"

"Here is our cure—"

"Oh, not in *that* way, surely!"—fleeing a little, seeing the sleek creature, all silk, lissomeness, sinister prettiness, drawing rapidly nearer.

"But," Darnley now said, "the kiosk and wall close the avenue behind us, and there seems to be no outlet through the hedge: we are rather entrapped. If we were not, we should be chased in attempting to escape."

"Yet save me from this—pray!"

"You insist?"

"Why, of course!"

"But how?"

"No weapon?"

"No . . . I have this . . ." drawing from his girdle the curved blade of a pigmy canghiar, a plaything with an agate handle: "but this could merely wound, and a wound would merely madden—."

"Henry! How near it is! It has stopped! is looking at us!"

"Let him look. To a stranger you might seem agitated—"

"No! No! not agitated . . . But save me—"

"Let us now undergo—"

"How hideous! Save me, pray!"

"You do insist?"

"Why, yes!"—without seeing how he *could* save, yet having from of old a deep-seated confidence in the competence of his will to perform miracles; and in truth he now looked from the brute to her, saying: "I *can* save you; but only in one way—by losing part of myself. Tell me how long I shall have to wait for you after?"

"'Losing part'—? I don't under— Any time you like! Only save one from—"

"Tomorrow?"

"Look—it is moving again! Yes! Any time—"

"At sunrise?"

The beast was not now three hundred feet away.

"Yes!"

"You consent?"

"Why, yes—look!"

"You promise?"

"Yes!"

Without more delay Darnley now raised the canghiar: three rapid slashes ripped away the left sleeve of his tunic

at the shoulder, and at a tug the sleeve fell to the ground, leaving the arm naked; where-upon the earl, who was as learned an anatomist as he was a cosmopolitan sportsman conversant with the moods of animals, buried the blade in the flesh of his shoulder at the point where the humerus joins the shoulder-blade in a ball-and-socket joint, then dissected the next-coming vessels, muscles, periosteum, and then, by the art of a quick twist, infixed the point betwixt the cartilages of the joint. So wildly rapid, yet exact, were his actions, that they were well nigh over before Rowena, wan with wonderment, quite realized what was being done: only when she remarked the cataract of blood rushing down the blanched arm, saw his grim jaw fixed like granite, did she understand and give out a cry, while the panther, crouching now, sniffing the wind scarcely sixty feet away, gave out a whine . . .

And now, dropping the canghiar, Darnley grasped his left wrist with the other hand, tugged, wrenched the arm from the shoulder: nor was he a moment too soon, for the creature's eyes were already glairy with the greens of desire; but even as it evilly crept, its belly down on the ground, wriggling in a prowl to spring, Darnley was swinging the arm like a club, and he flung it wheeling, to drop before the beast's nostrils.

With instant glee the panther sprang upon the godsend.

Then a minute's waiting, until the animal was well engaged in munching with a sideward head and shut eyes, and now Darnley advanced menacingly upon it, stamping; upon which the panther, snatching up the godsend, growling,

slunk farther down the avenue; again Darnley advanced, again it went slinking with its windfall; until at the avenue's end it slipped away.

Meantime, Rowena had stood rooted: but when she discerned that the earl was returning, she tripped down the hill to him. He was then holding his waist-shawl over the butchered shoulder, livid as mare's milk is; and she was as bloodless, at her consciousness that he had bought her with blood.

"I must—you see—leave you," he panted, all shocked, short-breaths, letting slip incontinent breaths through his livid lips, but still smiling; and, in saying "I must leave you," he glanced as negligently to the left as at a rent in his dress.

And she: "Oh, Henry, pray! pray! a doctor . . ."

He panted: "It is unnecessary"—callously as mortal man could—"I am at the Hôtel d'Espagne—not far. I returned—to say you—an *au r'voir*."

"Ah, Henry!"—placing her palm on his right shoulder, while he glanced fondly at her, saying: "So you give yourself at last?"

A dying "yes" sighed from her, her lips very near to his; but no caress escaped his will: she was another's—"till death"; after death his. Meantime, he was a man of honour, of inflexible integrity . . .

"At sunrise, then?"—from him.

Afresh dismayed, she started from him! "When is sunrise?"

"Half-past six precisely."

"Tomorrow?"

"Why—yes."

"To be cut off . . . Well, but say seven, or—eight."

"Eight, then. Take this."

Letting the cloth drop from that round of red that spouted, he produced two vials, to present her one, and say: "Three drops."

"At eight . . . ?"

"At eight . . . Arrivederci."

"Henry . . . *in God's name* . . ." she hissed after him.

But he was gone: and she, standing aghast there, gazed after his swaying gait wavering down the incline, for already he tended to dying, yet was heady as with wine. As for her, her heart, that struck slow and rough like hammer-strokes, was divided within her: she had to die—but desired life.

Rowena slept deeply from three until seven a.m.

The moment she opened her eyes she was conscious of a horror of oppression on her heart, and shuddered. But just as on other days she rang for her maid; presently lay in a wrapper of apricot brocade on a couch in her boudoir; murmured the word "Chocolate".

When she had sipped a little Spanish chocolate thick like soup, she sat some time under her maid's hand, musing on the luxurious movement of a comb through her hair; then dismissed the maid. By which time it was only twenty minutes before that fated hour, Eight: a bright, warm morning.

She put out her arm, took the vial handed her by the earl, looked at it, turning it, turning it, in her fingers some min-

utes: until now her mouth pushed into a *moue* of impatience. For Morning brings thinkings, Night being all another country and mode of being, upon which, and upon its moon-shines and commotions, we look back by the sun's brightness with a kind of surprise and recovered sanity. Standing up, therefore, she now stepped on tiptoe to a casement, and let the vial slip from her fingers into a courtyard, listening to catch the flimsy crash of its fracture. Now, however, she was not less pale than death itself.

But to bear his contempt—he alive, she alive! This, too, was a kind of death, for she was a thing built by his opinion of her, and had long lived and had her being in the fantasy of his dream of her: so there she stood, waiting guiltily, letting the golden moments go, her hand pressing down her heart's extravagant gallop. At eight he would die—and now it wanted only seven minutes . . . She had to send to stop him: but should she not have sent *before*? Not let the golden moments go? . . . He was "at the Hôtel d'Espagne"; but whereabouts that was she did not know: and time had somehow slipped away, she had dallied, yes, her heart smote her hard, though the thought of his contempt—she alive, he alive—was hard also. She rang a bell.

And "Where is the Hôtel d'Espagne?" she angrily asked.

Her maid answered: "A quarter of a mile, my lady—"

"Fly with this—a mounted messenger—"

She scratched and dashed at the maid the flat phrase: "Pray do nothing."

And the moment she was alone she locked her doors upon herself, in the instinct to hide away from sight that

quivering that now potently reigned over her frame; then down she dropped upon her couch, her eyes shut tight.

Three minutes more, and the click of a little clock toward its stroke thrilled her through and through with its news: two, three—each to her like the booming of some drum of doom; four, five . . . the sigh that trembled from her breast at the fatal eighth was, really, a sigh of relief.

Farewell! She felt definitely that he was dead; and in that moment hated, revolted from, felt well rid of, him.

But orbless mortal! unconscious how all about the common object is the Myriad! and stronger than the obvious of things the Bottomless that they blossom on!

It was not until ten minutes after eight that her messenger alighted at the Hôtel d'Espagne, to find it in a state of agitation: and he dashed away back laden with the tale that the death of Darnley had just been discovered.

But blank was his wonderment, on coming back, to find the palace of his master in a state of distraction precisely resembling that of the Hôtel d'Espagne! He was informed by his awed companions that through and through that part of the palace containing the Lady Rowena's apartments there had screamed forth, at precisely three minutes past eight, a cry so appalling as to paralyse all to the marrow, a cry at the same time soprano and guttural, at once wild and gross. But on running to Rowena's rooms the menials had been confronted only by bolted doors . . .

And toward afternoon all Rome was thrown into gloom by rumours of two dissolutions—a gloom intensified by an element of gruesome mystery that mingled with the melan-

choly of the event: for in the case of Lord Darnley the cause of death was readily enough traced to a very strong poison in use among Poona coolies; but in the case of the Lady Rowena every brain stood amazed. The mucous membrane of her throat, it is true, gave some vague indications, according to the doctors, of strangulation; but this statement was accompanied by the added statement that the fingers of the strangler (if there was a strangler) were of such a species as to leave not the faintest trace or impression on the snow of the lady's throat.

The Bell of St. Sépulcre

IT WAS during my tramp through Provence three summers ago that I came one evening to Leburn-les-Bruyères, a hamlet near the bottom of the Bezons valley. Here I found the inn so poor, that I resolved to tramp on to Cargnac, four miles off.

"But," said an old vigneron, whom I asked to put me on the path through the forest, "you should go round about by the road."

"Why?" I asked him—"that means another kilomètre?"

"We of these parts hardly use the path now," was his answer: "don't you go that way"—with a certain earnestness and admonition . . .

"What, wolves about here?" I asked him.

He lowered his voice to say: "You may see someone named La Mère Gouvion"—as if to say "you may see Beelzebub."

I supposed that he meant a ghost, and, as I knew something of Southern superstitiousness, and was in a hurry, I handed him a franc, and went on by the forest-path.

I found it in some parts choked with bush—myrtle,

kermes-oak—which I had to part before me; and by the moonshine above the bush I saw in that short distance two of those mounds named barrows, placed there by “the fairies”; then, when I had tramped three kilomètres through a rather intolerable solitude, the shock came: three mètres to my left within a sort of clearing I saw the woman . . .

She was seated on a fragment of one of those rocks that they call “menhirs”.

I had the impression in the hazy moonshine that she was moving her shoulders slowly from side to side, her hand supporting her jaw, some grace in the fall of her rags suggesting a statue set on a pedestal. Her stature, I could see, was gigantic—her great arms like clubs, her great bosom and spread of shoulder, her mouth open in a cavern of darkness that looked oblong, her hair black-and-grey, a tangle of snakes; and, as I walked past, her eyes followed me with that kind of gaze with which an ox stops cropping to gaze after a passer.

The image of this woman filled my mind until I got to Cagnac, near nine; and that same night, while sitting in an inn-garden with swings, nine-pins, arbours, I was told by my host the story of “La Mère Gouvion”.

“She came,” he told me, “of a well-to-do family who owned land on the far side of Lebrun-les-Bruyères, her father being a mighty big man, known as a hard bargainer as far as Avignon and Orange, and in Lebrun everybody feared him, even the curé, for it was said that he did not believe in the good God, he drank half a litre of cognac every night, so that one could hear him marching up and down his verandah to a late hour, quarrelling with nobody,

and carrying on; terrible he was when the drink had him, like a man mad with sun-stroke.

"And one summer, when the phylloxera had rotted his vine-leaves, and things were looking bad for harvest, on an awful night long remembered he raised his hand, defied the heavens to do their worst, and challenged the bell of St. Sépulcre to ring in his hearing—for the bell was said to be a little audible from his yard.

"His wife ran to hide under a bed, dreading the bell-toll, his daughter Maude herself trembled. Some had it to say that the bell did ring in his hearing; however that was, he perished shortly afterwards in convulsions, and was buried without the blessing of the Church.

"Soon after him his good woman also passed away: and Maude Gouvion was left mistress of all.

"And now things began to look alive indeed. If the patch of yellowish moss appeared on all the vineleaves of the parish, Maude Gouvion's trellises were still green."

Maude's spray and pruning-scissors should, no doubt, have accounted for this prosperity, but there were those who thought of black magic when the mulberry-disease and the failure of the madder-crop, which were the cry all round, seemed to keep clear of her fields.

"The truth was that her man toiled for her with the consciousness of her hard eyes behind them, for she was more masterful than any man; and, moreover, she covered her land with a new-fangled sort of sandy stuff from Marseilles, so that, the next vintage, sixty barrels of light wine rolled off in her cart to Avignon, as against le père Gouvion's maximum of fifty-three.

"Meanwhile, no one could stand the sight of her passions, if anything went wrong, as when she threw big Huguénin, the blacksmith, down some stairs for laming a mule in shoeing. In Lebrun-les-Bruyères the curé called 'Silence!' at anyone who mentioned her name. She had not once been inside the church door since her father's death."

But one Sunday morning, she being then thirty-five, Maude, to everyone's astonishment, turned up in the little church in the valley. "Never," said my landlord, "was seen such finery, rings and ribbons, though Maude was ordinarily slatternly in dress; and she carried her head high, as though the church was not good enough for her feet, while the curé stammered and changed colour."

"And why do you think she did this? It was as a preliminary to coming out as a married woman, for she was about to marry the little Tombarel, the shoemaker, as was soon known. And there was a great whispering and excitement then, for everyone knew that no one would have wished to marry Maude, rich as she was, a woman whose own father, as report said, had heard the bell: so that Maude must have fixed upon the little Tombarel for her own reasons, and done her own wooing."

"But which bell is it," I asked, "that you keep speaking of?"

He looked astonished. "Well, I should have thought that even a stranger . . . I mean—do I not?—the bell of St. Sépulcre."

"What does this bell do?" I asked him.

"It is a sound which one should not hear," he answered, with a frown. "It is believed to bring—well, I could not tell

you—evil upon those who hear it.”

He was silent. Then: “But talking of this poor little Tombarel, everyone pitied him. It is said that, on his taking a pair of sabots to the presbytère, the priest admonished him to trust to the saints for protection from the Evil One; and, in saying this, he was supposed to throw a stone at Maude Gouvion. A week before the civil marriage Tombarel ran away to Cazalès, but Maude followed him, and, it was said, knocked him down with a box; so they came back together, and were married.

“Soon afterwards Maude gave birth to her son Pierre. As for the poor Tombarel, he did not survive his marriage three months.

“This Pierre grew up a sickly, pale lad; but the uglier everybody thought him, the prouder his mother was of him. He was everything to her—she went foolish with love only to look at him.

“He was a cripple, with disease of the hip-joint, and three times a week for years his mother took him over to La Risolette to be seen to. When the doctor told her that the child could not possibly live, she only laughed, and said the man was a fool who did not know his business. And live it did.

“But Pierre had a mental disease as well—his crazy craving for blood: for to sling a pebble from a catapult into the eye of a pig was his delight. At thirteen he was the death of a little girl, and later on was discovered with a cut that he had made in his own neck. His mother slung him to her shoulder that day, with that square opening of the mouth which was her way in her agitations, and ran to La Risolette

with the dead weight, not waiting for a cart. It was the feat of a horse."

Such, then, was Pierre. The children shrank from contact with him, and it got to be a prophecy in the village that the day would come when the bell of St. Sépulcre would sound upon the ears of Maude Gouvion's son.

"But," said mine host, in a *patois* whose quaintness I despair of quite conveying, "whatever he did, if he stuck a calf, or half killed a child, or lay down all day fuddled by the roadside, his mother still laughed and petted him: this only made her love him the more proudly and the more loudly. She was foolish with her love."

"Pierre," he went on, "was sweet on Rosalie Tissot, granddaughter of Tissot, the schoolmaster, the prettiest golden-haired fairy that ever was, engaged to be married to Martin Dejoie, who was a carpenter at La Risolette. Pierre lay in wait for her everywhere, with a patience which was strange for him; but she laughed at his shrunken form, with a derision in which there was ever more terror than laughter, knowing how cruelly he loved her, hardly knowing perhaps what a peril lay in her laughter.

"When the date of her marriage with Martin Dejoie came near, Pierre went and threw himself at his mother's knees in a room where she sat shelling peas, saying to her: 'Mother, I shall go and kill myself, for I am the laughing-stock of the place because I am not like others, and, if I do not have Rosalie, they will laugh at me the more.' Now, his mother's heart was like a harp to him, he knew that to tell her of the folks' laughing was to lash her into a scratching cat, and 'Wait, Pierre,' says she now over her pease, quite quietly:

'wait, my son; you shall marry this girl.'

"That same night when the village was asleep Mother Gouvion wrapped her head up, and came down upon Tissot's cottage near the church, Tissot nearly dropping dead with fright when he hobbled from bed in his red-wool night-cap and saw her standing there, so big that she had to bend her body to get in. Well, she offered everything for Rosalie—eight thousand francs in the *Crédit* at Avignon, the olives, the two presses, the stock and plant—all should be Pierre's and Rosalie's: and meantime the old Tissot sat shivering, hands on knees, not knowing what to say.

"At last he stammers that Rosalie would not consent, since her marriage with Martin Dejoie was a marriage of love. 'Rosalie is only a child,' says la Mère Gouvion; 'leave her to me.' 'Well, well,' says Tissot.

"So Mother Gouvion returned home satisfied. If only matters had rested there! But she had hardly gone when Tissot woke up his grandson, and sent him with a note to tell Martin Dejoie to be sure to come over to Lebrun the next morning. So Martin Dejoie came; but, on coming, he put his head in at the school-door, the children saw him, and two hours later Mother Gouvion knew all about that meeting. The two men had a confabulation together, Tissot declaring that the only way was for Martin to carry off Rosalie secretly to Avignon the night before the ten days' notice was up, and marry her there. But it was no secret in the village that three of the days were already gone, and the silly old man did not stop to consider that Mother Gouvion would surely know when the ten days would expire. As a matter of fact, she had no sooner heard of that interview between

Tissot and Dejoie than she knew perfectly well what had been settled, It is said in Lebrun-les-Bruyères that she sent a message that same evening to Dejoie, asking him to come and talk the matter over with her, but that Dejoie would not even receive the message. If this is true, it was the last attempt made by la Mère Gouvion to change Dejoie's mind in his scheme to outwit her."

At eleven, then, in the night preceding that tenth day of notice, Martin Dejoie, a tall active chap, was crossing the moor between La Risolette and Lebrun-les-Bruyères, the moor on which stands St. Sépulcre. He was coming to meet Rosalie, who, with Tissot's old *gouvernante*, was waiting for him in a cart behind the presbytère-wood, to be off with him to Avignon; and he was taking the shortest road to her, though people coming from La Risolette to Lebrun usually make a *détour* to avoid the moor, so desolate is its barren expanse, on which grows only vine-stumps and some lavender-shrubs, with here or there a miasmatic "clair" (pool), or a cypress standing out blighted against the sky, or a gang of those black rocks, having hollows, that the Provencals call "cagnards". Over all north-west winds draw along volumes of a white dust, wide-winged, there being often mistral over the moor when the valleys lie tranquil.

At one part of this Dead Sea Border of Provence stands, where it has stood since the time of the Franks, the ruins of St. Sépulcre, choked now with brambles, hiding behind a strange rankness of vegetation. But the belfry remains unbroken, and, they say, the bell-rope, and the bell.

I will not delay to tell you the ancient tale of bale which gave to this bell its awesomeness among all those glens: but

for the poor wretch who hears its tone life is practically over, heart fails and brain—this throughout a district of sceptical France extending from beyond Lebrun-les-Bruyères quite on, I believe, to Hudin: the hearer of the bell is accursed; what he sets about shall fail, and shall rebound with tribulation upon his head; if he be not instantly struck down, his life will still be poisoned; the air will hurt him; water will burn him; his blessedness will be in death.

On the night when Martin Dejoie started out for Rosalie from La Risolette the mist on the moor was luminous with moonlight, and only a little wind moved: so that Mother Gouvion could see some distance from the church-step, where she stood hidden within the mass of sarsaparilla and kermes-oaks that choked the church-portal. "For many years no foot had ventured so near St. Sépulcre as hers this night, and she drank brandy from a vial to keep her defiance bright in her brain—all that I am telling you now being only what la Mère Gouvion herself revealed long afterwards, and every word's true. She had groped to see if the bell-rope was still there, intending, if not, to drag herself up like a cat to get at the bell; but the rope was there, still pretty strong, though rotted—she could see a little by the rays of moonlight that came through the ruins; and now she stood peering between the bushes at the footpath over the moor, waiting for Martin Dejoie to appear: for she understood that, with such a business in hand, he would not make a *détour* round St. Pierre, but would come over the moor.

"At last, near eleven, a sound of someone whistling reached her, for Martin did not like to be passing so near the bell, so was whistling to himself for company; and at

once Mother Gouvion set to work, first plugging up her ears with cotton-wool, and over this a bandage, her plan being to make the bell clang, yet not hear it herself. Her only trouble was the doubt whether the man coming was Martin. Suppose it was Pierre himself? Pierre sometimes crossed the moor at night; Pierre whistled. But it was all right—it was Martin—she saw that, when he had got opposite. He stopped his whistling then, bent his head, crossed his breast—in the vigour of his life—a young man just going to be married—suddenly clang, clang, clang for him . . .

“On her face she lay watching him where he had dropped against one of the cagnards; then she stole away home, elated, thinking in herself, ‘I didn’t hear the bell-sound! I didn’t hear it!’

“Well, Rosalie and Tissot waited in vain for Martin Dejoie that night; it was not till five days later that his body was found at the bottom of that ravine north of the moor that is called ‘Le Dé du Diablo’. Whether he tumbled down there in his distraction, or dashed himself down in his despair, is not known, but he was believed to have heard the bell; and it was years before anyone supposed that his death was not owing to an act of God.

“And so la Mère Gouvion kept her word; and Rosalie in a few months was married to Pierre.

“But,” said my host, in his Doric patois, “it was never a good thing for la Mère Gouvion that she did what she had done. Rosalie was the worst wife that Pierre could have had, for she was so winning and sweet, and he loved her so much, that for months at a time he was a changed lad: and the result was this, that there would ensue reactions, during

which the white face of that little lame man became a fright in the valley, he going about like a dog with the hydrophobia, his eyes alight. Once he stabbed his mother in the arm, and sometimes had to be watched lest he should stab himself. And so it went on near five years.

"And they had misfortunes in the vineyard, too. There came three bad years, when even L'Hermitage and La Nerte and the big vintages of Provence came to nothing; and the fourth year la Mère Gouvion's madder-yield was a gone hope before May; and she had to sign a paper with the agent at Cargnac which almost compromised the shelter over her head. So she was not very happy in her mischief-doing, after all.

"But she adored her 'petit', her 'little one', never less, gloried in secret over the deed she had done for him; and when he made himself a terror she hugged herself, preferring terror to laughing-stock. 'They won't grin with their ugly gums at my petit, my little one, now,' she'd say.

"And one bitter winter's night all came to an end . . .

"Pierre had broken loose again; screams reached even to the village from the Gouvion vineyard; and presently a girl came running down to the presbytère, saying that Rosalie would be killed. Heaven knows what really happened, for Rosalie was never seen again, so it is supposed that Pierre must have killed her, and that la Mère Gouvion did away with her body somehow; but no body was ever discovered, so that all that part of the business remains a mystery. Mother Gouvion, who raved out a great deal of what I am saying now during her brief imprisonment afterwards, never said anything about this matter.

"However, when the curé hears this, he begins to pray,

than saddles his mule, and gallops off through the gale for Avignon. Before midnight a body of *sergents* arrive at the vineyard; they search for Pierre; Pierre cannot be found. La Mère Gouvion, sewing, with her mouth opened square, tells them that she does not know where he has gone to."

A wild night—I have seen three such in Provence—lightnings that terrify, a very deluge of water, tempest from the north calling to whirlwind from the west: a Southern storm . . . Mother Gouvion dashed out into it the moment she found herself free of the *sergents*—forgot her uncovered head, but remembered to take every sou she possessed. She had arranged to meet Pierre out on the moor, the only safe meeting-place, intending, it seems, to take, or send, him to the coast, to get him aboard a ship—nothing would be impossible to her. The officers, it was true, were scouring the valley on horseback with lanterns; but they were nothing; she would outwit them . . .

But when, on reaching the moor, she ran to the agreed *cagnard*, Pierre was not in it; to the next—Pierre not there; and with distracted runs she dashed from *cagnard* to *cagnard*. Her heart misgave her now, her glance questioned the heavens—they were black enough; and, stumbling about within a tempest of hair, a pillar of seaweed that stumbles, she lifted her voice: "*Pierre!*"—wayward boy of her heart: where, then, was he?

And another terror struck her—the bell . . . it was believed to bleat some midnights when storms were abroad on the moor . . . "But not to-night!"—and, as she said this, a vaster tantrum of the tempest terrorized her. She stumbled and was down in the mud; a prayer broke from her.

A night of climaxes of wind: and in the midst of each the woman beseeching, coaxing: "Any other night, not to-night; it would not be right; would be hard on a poor mother's heart"—for hours, till the gale began to abate, and the danger ended.

It was only toward morning, when, though the darkness was as black as ever, the storm had lulled and her dreads of the bell were at rest, it was then that, all at once—she heard it. Not a clamorous clang, clang, this time, as when she had rung it for Martin Dejoie, but one toll only, floating out doleful on the breast of the trembling air.

It was over, then? No hope? Suddenly the woman threw up her head, gnashed, shook her fist, as her father before her had done, at the bell, at the heavens. "Blast away bell . . . !" Bells were nothing: she would discover her little one as soon as there was a little light—would tear him from the clutch of the *sergents*: it would be all right yet . . .

"On setting out once more to search, she found herself just in front of the church, and, as some sheet-lightning was playing then, she chanced to observe the mark of a man's foot before the church-portal. At this she started, chilled to the marrow by a sense of the supernatural: for it was not to be believed that any living being would have come so near the bell on a night so wild. Under her breath she uttered 'Martin Dejoie?' . . . for what power had rung the bell in her hearing? it had not been the wind!

"Just then a tramp of horses' hoofs reached her ears—the *sergents* still ransacking the countryside for Pierre; and she ran into the bush at the church-door, lest they might spy her in the play of the lightning. Five years before she had

stood just there—and done a thing. And now her flesh shivered to see the sarsaparilla freshly trampled, the branches parted: someone had entered St. Sépulcre that night! and at the thought of the vengeance of the murdered dead her heart turned faint.”

But some fascination led her steps over the threshold, and she stood in the still thicker gloom within, hearing the rasping of her own throat, hearing the gallop of a heart thumping out the whole gamut of fright, pride, desperation; till, all at once, a blaze of lightning searched the church, and by it was revealed to her the reason why the bell had rung: it was because someone had tied the bell-rope round his throat, kicked away a stone, and hanged himself there. He hung still now: and eye to eye they looked—mother and son.

They found her the next morning wandering on the moor, harmless and listless, with a slanting smile; and they took her to the asylum at Avignon where, after many weeks, something resembling reason returned to her. When they had gathered her story from her mutterings, they let her out again; but she would not go home, took up her abode in woods, etc., sleeping in *cagnards*, living on olives, nuts, fruits. Her favourite haunt (if she still lives) is the “menhir” by the abandoned path between Lebrun-les-Bruyères and Cargnac.

Huguenin's Wife

"Ah! bitter-sweet!"—Keats.

HUGUENIN, my friend—the man of Art and thrills and impulses—the *boulevardier*, the *persifleur*—must, I concluded with certainty, be frenzied. So, at last, I reasoned when, after years of silence, I received from him this letter:—

"'*Sdili*,' my friend; that is the name by which they now call this ancient Delos. Wherefore has it been written, 'so passeth the glory of the world.'

"Ah! but to me it is—as to *her* it was—still Delos, the Sacred Island, birthplace of Apollo, son of Leto! On the summit of Cynthus I look from my dwelling, and within the wild reach of the Cyclades perceive even yet the offerings of fruit arriving from Syria, from Sicily, from Egypt; to festival—I note the flutter of their holy robes—the breeze once more floats to me their 'Songs of Deliverance.'

"The island now belongs almost entirely to me. I am, too, almost its sole inhabitant. It is, you know, only four miles long, and half as broad, and I have bought up every available foot of its face. On the flat top of the granite Cynthus I live, and here, my friend, I shall die. Fetters more inexorable and horrible than any that the limbs of Prometheus ever felt rivet me to this crag.

"A friend! That is the thing after which my sick spirit famishes. A *living man*: of the dead I have enough; of living monsters, ah, too much! and a servant or two, who seem persistently to shun me—this is all I possess of human fellowship. Yet I dare not implore you, my old companion, to come to the comfort of a sinking man in this place of desolation. . . ."

The epistle continued in this strain of mingled rhapsody and despair, containing, moreover, a long rigmarole on the Pythagorean dogma of the metempsychosis of the soul. Three times did the words "living monsters" occur.

From London to Delos is a journey; yet, conquered during a long vacation by an irresistible impulse, and the fond memories of other days, I actually found myself, on a starry night, disembarking on the sands that bound the once renowned harbor of the tiny island, and my arrival may be dated by the fact that it took place just two months before the extraordinary phenomena of which Delos was the scene during the night of 13th August, 1890. I first crossed the ring of flat land that almost encircles the islet, and then commenced the ascent of the central rise, the air slumbrous with the breath of rose, jasmine, almond, with the call of the cicala, the shine of the firefly. In forty minutes I had walked into a tangled garden, and placed my hand on the back of a tall man, habited in Attic garments, who was pacing there.

With a start he faced me.

"Oh," he said, panting, and clapping his hands upon his chest, "I was awfully startled! My heart—"

It was Huguenin, and yet not he. The beard rolling over

his snowy robes of wool was still ebon as ever; but the fluff of hair that floated with every zephyr over his face and neck was a lifeless fluff of wool white. He stared at me with the lifeless and cavernous eyes of a man long dead.

When we entered the dwelling together, the mere appearance of the building was enough to convince me that in some mysterious way, to some morbid degree, the past had fettered and darkened the intellect of my friend. The mansion was of Hellenic type, but nothing less than mad in extent—a desert more than a habitation, a Greek house multiplied many times over into a congeries of Greek houses, like objects seen through angular glasses. It consisted of a single storey, though here and there on the flat roof there rose a second layer of apartments, attained by ladders. We walked through a door—opening inwards—into a passage, which took us to a courtyard, or *aule*, surrounded by Corinthian pillars, and having in the middle an altar of marble to *Zeus Herkeios*. Around this court were ranged chambers, *thalamoi*, hung with velvets; and the whole house—made up of a hundred and a hundred reproductions of such courtyards with their surrounding chambers—formed a trackless Sahara of halls through whose labyrinths the most crafty could not but fail to thread his way.

"This building," Huguenin said to me, some days after my arrival, "this building—every stone, plank, drapery—was the creation of my wife's wild fancy."

I stared at him.

"You doubt that I have, or had, a wife? Come with me; you shall—see her face."

He now led the way through the windowless house, lighted

throughout the day and night by the reddish ray shed from many little censer lamps of terra-cotta filled with *nardinum*, an oil pressed from the blossom of the fragrant grass *nardus* of the Arabs.

I followed Huguenin through a good number of the rooms, noticing that, as he moved slowly onward, he kept his body bent, seeming to seek for something; and this something I quickly found to be crimson thread, laid down on the floor to afford a clue for the foot through the mazes of the house. Suddenly he stopped before the door of one of the apartments called *amphithalamoi*, and, himself staying without, motioned me to enter.

Now I am hardly a man of what might be called a tremulous diathesis, yet it was not without a tremor that I looked round that room. At first I could discern nothing under the glimmer from a single *lampas* hanging in the middle, but presently a painting in oils, unframed, occupying nearly one side of the room, grew upon my sight: the painting of a woman: and my pulses underwent a strange agitation as I gazed on her face.

She stood robed in flowing ruby *peplos*, with her head thrown back, and one hand and arm pointing starkly outward and upward. The countenance was not merely Grecian—antique Grecian, as distinct from modern—but Grecian in a highly exaggerated and unlife-like degree. Was the woman, I asked myself, more lovely than ever mortal was before—or loathsome? For Lamia stood there before me—"shape of gorgeous hue, vermilion-spotted, golden, green and blue"—and a kind of surprise held me fixed as the image slowly took possession of my vision. The Gorgon's head!

whose hair was snakes; and as I thought of this I thought, too, of how from the guttering gore of the Gorgon's head monsters rose; and then, with abhorrence, I remember Huguenin's ravings as to "monsters." I stepped nearer, in order to analyze the impression almost of dread wrought upon me, and I quickly found—or thought that I found—the key: it lay in the lady's eyes: the very eyes of the tigress: greedy glories of green glaring with radii of gold. I hurried from her.

"You have seen her?" Huguenin asked me with an eager leer of cunning.

"Yes, Huguenin," I said, "she is very beautiful."

"She painted it herself," he said in a whisper.

"Really!"

"She considered herself—she *was*—the greatest painter since Apelles."

"But now—where is she?"

He brought his lips to my ear.

"Dead. *You*, at any rate, would say so."

Well, to words so apparently senseless I would pay no attention then; but they recurred to me when I unearthed the circumstance that it was his way, at certain intervals, to make furtive visits to distant districts of the dwelling. Our bed-chambers being close together I could not fail, as time passed, to notice that he would rise in the dead of night, when he supposed me drowsing, and gathering together the fragments of our last repast, depart rapidly and soundlessly with them through the vastness of the house, led always in one particular direction by the thread of silk whose crimson lay over the floor.

I now set myself strenuously to the study of Huguenin. The name and nature of his physical sickness, at least, was clear—the affection to which physicians have given the name Cheyne Stoke's Respiration, compelling him to lie back at times in an agony of inhalation, and groan for air. The bones of his cheeks seemed to be near appearing through their sere trumpery of mummyskin; the *alae* of his nose got no repose from their extravagance of expansion and retraction. But even this wreck of a body might, I believe, be rescued, were it not that to assuage the rage and feverishness of such a *mind* the spheres contained no thyme. For one thing, a most queer belief in some unnamed fate hanging over the little land he lived on haunted him. Again and again he recalled to me all that in the far past had been written in regard to Delos: the strange notion contained both in the Homeric and the Alexandrian hymns to the Delian Apollo that Delos was *floating*; or that it was only held by chains; or that it had only been thrown up from the ocean as a temporary resting-place for Ortygia in her birth-giving; or that it might *sink* again before the spurning foot of the newborn god. He was never weary, through hours, of pursuing, as if in soliloquy, a species of sleepy exegesis of such scriptures as we read together. "Do you know," he said to me, "that the Greeks really believed the streams of Delos to rise and fall with the rise and fall of the Nile? Could anything point more strongly to the extraordinary character of this land, its far-extending volcanic constructions, occult geologic eccentricities?" Then he might recite the punning line of the very old Sibylling prophecy—

"And Samos shall be sand, and Delos (the far-seen) sink

from sight;" often, also, having recited it, he would strike from the repining chords of a lyre the theme of a threnody which, as he told me, his wife had composed to suit the line; and when to the funeral ruth of this tune—so wild with woe and whining, that I could never listen to it without a thrill—Huguenin added the sadness of his now so hollow voice, the intensity of effect upon me got to the intolerable degree, and I was glad of that pallid gloaming of the mansion, which partially hid my emotion.

"Remark, however," he said one day, "the meaning of the 'far-seen' as regards Delos: it means 'glorious' 'illustrious'—far-seen to the spiritual rather than to the physical eye, for the island is not very elevated. The words 'sink from sight' must, therefore, be supposed to have the corresponding significance of an extinction of this glory. And now think whether or not this prophecy has not been already fulfilled, when I tell you that this sacrosanct land, which no dog's foot was once permitted to touch, on which no man was permitted to be born or be buried, bears at this moment on its bosom a monster more loathsome than even a demon's brain, I believe, ever conceived. A literal and physical fulfilment of the prophecy cannot, I consider, be always distant."

But all this esotericism was not native to Huguenin: his mind, I was convinced, had been ploughed into by some very potent energy, before ever this growth had choked it. I enticed him, little by little, to speak of his wife.

She was, he told me, of a very antique Athenian family, which by constant effort had preserved its purity of blood; and it was while moving through Greece in a world-weary mood that, on reaching one night the village of Castri, there,

on the site of the ancient Delphi, in the center of an angry throng of Greeks and Turks, who threatened to rend her to fragments, he first saw Andromeda his wife. "This incredible courage," he said, "this vast originality was hers, to take upon herself the part of a modern Hypatia—to venture upon the task of the bringing back of the gods, in the midst of fanatics, at the latter end of a century like the present. The crowd from which I rescued her was howling round her in the vestibule of a just completed temple to Apollo, whose cult she was then and there attempting to set up."

The love of the woman fastened upon her preserver with passionate fervor, and Huguenin, constrained by the vigor of a will not to be resisted, came at her bidding to live in the gray building of her creation at Delos: in which solitude, under which shadow, the man and the woman faced each other. Ere many weeks it was revealed to the husband that he had married a seer of visions and a dreamer of dreams. And visions of what tinge! and dreams of what madness! He confessed to me that he was awed by her, and with his awe was blended a feeling which, if it was not fear, was akin to fear. That he loved her not at all he now knew, while the extravagance of her passion for him he grew to regard as gruesome. Yet his mind took on the hue of hers; he drank in her doctrines, followed her as a satellite. When for days she hid herself from him, he would wander desolate and full of search over his pathless home. Finding that she habitually yielded her body to the delights of certain seeds that grew on Delos, he found the courage to frown, but ended by himself becoming a bond-slave to the drowsy *ganja* of Hindustan. So, too, with the most strange fascination which she exercised

over the animal world: he disliked it—dreaded it; regarded it as excessive and unnatural; but looked on only with the furtive eye of suspicion, and said nothing. When she walked she was accompanied by a magnetized *queue* of living things, felines in particular, and birds of large size; while dogs, on the contrary, shunned her, bristling. She had brought with her from the continent a throng of these followers, of which Huguenin had never beheld the half, since they were imprisoned in unknown nooks of the building; and anon she would vanish, to reappear with new companions. Her kindness to these creatures should, no doubt, have been sufficient to account for her power over them; but Huguenin's mind, already grown morbid, probed darkly after other explanation. The primary *motif* of this uneasiness doubtless lay in his wife's fanaticism on the matter of the Pythagorean dogma of the transmigration of souls. On this theme Andromeda, it was clear, was outrageously deranged. She would stand, he declared, with her arm outstretched, her eyes wild-staring, her body rigid, and in a rapid recitative—like the rapt Pythoness—prophesy of the mutations prepared for the spirit of man, dwelling, above all, with contempt, on the paucity of animal forms in the world, and insisting that the spirit of an original man, disembodied, *should and must* re-embody itself in a correspondingly original form. "And," she would often add, "such forms exist, but the God, willing to save the race from frenzy, hides them from the eyes of common men."

It was long, however, before I could get Huguenin to describe the final catastrophe of his wedded life. He related it in these words:—

"You now know that Andromeda was among the great painters—you have gloated upon her portrait of herself. Well, one day, after dilating, as was her wont, on the paucity of forms, she said, 'But you, too, shall be of the initiated: come, you shall see *something*.' She then went swiftly, beckoning, looking back often to smile on me a fond patronage, and I followed, till she stopped before a lately finished painting, pointing. I will not attempt—the attempt would be folly—to tell you what thing I saw before me on the canvas; nor can I explain in words the tempest of anger, of loathing and disgust, that stirred within me at the sight; but at that blasphemy of her fancy, I raised my hand to strike her head; and to this moment I know not if I struck her. My hand, it is true, felt the sensation of contact with something soft; but the blow, if blow there was, was hardly hard enough to harm a creature far feebler than man. Yet she fell; the film of death spread over her upbraiding eye; one last thing only she spoke, pointing to the uncleanness: 'You may yet see it in the flesh'; and so, still pointing, sped away.

"I bore her body, embalmed in the Greek manner by an artist of Corinth, to one of the smaller apartments on the roof, and saw, as I moved to leave her in her gloom, the mortal smile on her lips within the open coffin. Two weeks later I went again to visit her. My friend, she had vanished—but for the bones; and from the coffin, above that skull, two eyes—living—the very eyes of Andromeda, but full of a newborn brightness—the eyes, too, of the horror she had painted, whose form I now made out in the darkness—looked out upon me. After I had slammed the door, I fainted on the stair."

"The suggestion," I said to him, "which you seem to wish to convey is that of a transition of forms, from man to animal; but, surely, the explanation that the monster, brought by your wife into the house, or born in it, imprisoned un-awares by you with the dead, and maddened by famine, fed on the body, is, if not less horrible, yet less improbable."

He looked doubtingly at me a moment, and then coldly said: "There was no monster imprisoned with the dead."

But at least, I pleaded, he would see the necessity of flying from that place. He replied with the avowal that it was no longer doubtful to him, from the effect which any neglect to minister to the monster's wants had upon his own health, that his life was bound up with the life of the being he stayed to maintain; that with the *second* murder which he should perpetrate—nay, with the attempt to perpetrate it, as by flight from the island—his life would be forfeited.

I accordingly formed the idea to effect the deliverance of my friend in spite of himself. Two months had now passed; the end of my visit was drawing near; yet his maladies of brain and body were not relieved: and it pained me to think of leaving him once more alone, a prey to his manias.

That very day, then, while he slept his damp trances, I started the tramp on the track of the scarlet thread. So far it hauled out its length, and the halls through which it passed were of such uniformity, and its path so wound about, that I could not doubt but that the clue once snapped at any point, the voyage along its route could be accomplished only by the most improbable chance. I followed the thread to its end, where it stopped at the foot of a ladder-stair. This I ascended to a door at its top, a door with a hole in it close to the bot-

tom, big enough to admit a plate; but, as I placed my foot on the uppermost step, a whine, complaining low, with a wild likeness to a woman's wail, sent me skipping, sick, whence I came.

But, some little distance from the steps, I broke the thread, and, gathering it up in my hand as I ran, again broke it near the region of the mansion which we occupied.

"In this way," I said, as I held the mass of thread to the flame of a lamp, "shall a man be saved."

I watched him afterwards through my half-shut eyes, as he departed, haggard and shuddering, hugging himself, on his nightly errand; and my heart galloped in an agony of disquiet while I awaited his coming again.

He was long. But when he came, he came swiftly, softly into my chamber and shook me by the shoulder. On his face was a look of unusual coolness, of dignity, of mystery.

"Wake up," he said: "I wish you to leave me tonight."

"But tell me—"

"I will take no refusal. Trust me this once, and go. There is a danger here. Two of the fisher-folk of the harbor will convey you over to Rhenea before the morning."

"But danger!" I said—"from what?"

"I cannot tell you: from the destiny, whatever it be, which awaits me. The thread on which my life depends is *snapped*."

"But suppose I tell you—"

"Ah! . . . you hear that?"

He held up his hand and hearkened: it was a sound of howling round the house.

"It is the wind rising," I muttered, starting up.

"But that which followed: didn't you *feel* it?"

I made him no answer.

He now clasped with his arms a marble column upon which he rested his forehead, while with one foot he kept on patting the floor; in which posture, quite demoralized and craven, he remained for some time, while the wind continued to rise; and suddenly he span toward me with a scream in a rapture of fear.

"Now at least—you *feel it!*"

I could not deny: it was as if the island had rocked a little to and fro on a pivot.

Now thoroughly demoralized myself, I now caught Huguenin's arm, and sought to draw him from the column which, muttering low, he was again hugging. But he would not stir; and I, determined in any event to stay by him, stood hearing the earthquake's increase while he seemed to take no further note of anything, motionless but for the motion of his foot. In this way an hour went by: at the end of which interval the rocking had become strong, rapid and continuous.

There came a second, when captured by a new panic, I sprang to shake him, understanding that some lamp had been dashed down in that passion of the mansion's agitation.

"Why, man!" I cried, "have you parted with every sense? Can't you feel that the house is in flames?"

On this his eyes, which had become dazed and dull, blazed up with a new lunacy.

"Then," he suddenly shouted in a passion of loudness, "I say she *shall* be saved!"

Before I could lay hold of the now foaming maniac, he had dashed past me into a passage. I followed in hot pursuit through rooms and corridors that seemed to reel in a furious

dream of heat and reek, hoping that he, weak of lung, would fall choked and exhausted. But some energy seemed to lend him strength—he rushed onward like the hurricane; some mysterious feeling seemed to lead him—never once did he hesitate.

And after all the long chase, which ever swayed at the rocking of the land, but never stopped, I saw that the intuitions of insanity had not failed the madman—he got to the goal he gasped after. I saw him fly up the ladder, whose foot was in a pool of fire, saw him fly to the door of the tomb of Andromeda, already flagrant, and drag it open. But as he dragged it, there broke out of the room—above the roaring of the conflagration, and of the gale, and of that thousandfold growling of the ground—a shriek, shrill yet ugly with gutturalness, which congealed me in that heat; and immediately I saw proceeding from the interior a creature whose obscenity and vileness language has no vocabulary to describe. For if I say that it was a cat—of great size—its eyes glaring like a conflagration—its fat frame wrapped in a mass of feathers, gray, vermillion-tipped—with a similitude of miniature wings on it—with a width of tail vast, down-turned, like the tails of birds-of-paradise—how by such words can I express half of all the retching of my nausea, the shame, the hate . . . The fire had ere this reached the thing, and on fire I could spy it fly rather than spring at Huguenin's heart; then its fangs like grapnels buried in his breast, the gluttony of its gums that met on his gullet, I saw through a fog of feathers raining, he tottering, tearing at the feathery horror, as backward he toppled from the landing over the spot where a moment before the ladder had stood.

By blessed luck, as I rapidly ran thence, I stumbled upon some exit, to find outside the night quite cloudless, star-lit, though a whirl of all the winds of the world were whistling within the vault of sky that night. In descending, too, to the level, I remarked a rather scorched aspect of some of the leafage, and at one spot saw a series of conical openings in the ground with greenish scoriae round their edges. Lower still, I stood on a bluff, and looking over the sea, witnessed a sight sublime to wildness: for the sea, too hurried to show billow, to show ripple, and lit up deep within its depth with a sheen of phosphorescence, was speeding as if after the steeds of Diomedes with the fleetest meaning towards Delos. Delos, indeed, seemed to "float," to be swimming like a little doomed fowl counter to the swoop of the boundless. With the morning's light I passed away from this mysterious shrine of Grecian piety, the final sight that greeted my gaze being the still rising reek of Huguenin's grave.

The Pale Ape

"A big thing of a pig."—Aristophanes.

YESTERDAY again I stood and looked at Hargen Hall from the lake; and it is this that has brought me to write of my life in it. Wintry winds were whistling through the withered bracken and the branches, whirling withered birch-leaves about the south quadrangle; and no birds sang.

When I first entered it I was a girl, one might say—gay enough; but now I have known what one never forgets; and the days and the hairs grow grey together.

Five titled names among my friends gained me an entrance to Hargen in the fall of the year '08. I arrived on the evening of 10th November; and shall never forget the strangeness of the impression made on my mind that night: for even ere I rounded into sight of the house, the sound of the waters far off filled me with a feeling of the eerily dreary—the house being almost surrounded with mountain and cliff, down which a series of cascades shower; and that night I had some difficulty in catching quite everything that was said to me, though in two or three days, maybe, my ear became used to the tumult.

It was four days before I met Sir Philip Lister himself—

Davenport, the old butler, told me that his master was "indisposed"—but Sir Philip sent me a polite missive inviting me to take things carelessly a little: so I spent the first days in learning my pupil's moods, and in roaming over the place, from "Queen Elizabeth's Room"—behind the bed still hung a velvet shield brodered with the royal arms in white wire—to the apes and the cascades. A sense of forlornness pervaded it all, for scarcely ten of us were in all the desert of that place, with an occasional glimpse of two or three gardeners, or a groom. The kitchen was now a panelled hall like a chapel, with windows of painted glass containing the six coats-of-arms of the Lister Lynns, a hall in whose vastness the cook and her assistant looked awfully forlorn and small; and hardly even a housemaid ever now entered all that part of the east wing which had been singed by a fire fifty-five years since.

It was on the fourth forenoon, a day of "the Indian summer," that my pupil took me to see the apes. There were three of them—two chimpanzees, one gibbon—in three rooms of wire-netting close to the east line of cliffs, i.e., about six hundred yards from the house. There, chuckling and chattering in the shadow of chestnuts, they lived their lives, anon speculating like philosophers upon their knots, or hearkening to the waters which chanted near in their ears. And there was a *fourth* room of netting in the row, but empty; as to which my pupil said to me:

"The one that used to be in this fourth room was huge, Miss Newnes, and had a pale face. He died some time before I came to Hargen: but his ghost walks when the moon is at the full."

"Now Esmé," I muttered. (Her name was Esmé Martagon, daughter of the Marquis de Martagon and of Margaret Lister, Sir Philip's sister; the child being at this time twelve years of age, and an orphan—a rather pretty elf with ebon curls, but as changeable as the shapes of mercury, now bursting with alacrity, and now cursed with black turns of sadness.)

"But if I have seen it?" she gravely replied, gazing up at me with her great eyes.

"The ghost of an ape, Esmé," I muttered.

For answer, flying off into vivacity, she cried to me: "Come, you shall hear it!"—and she led the way northward through the park, until we walked down a dark path tremulous with spray, where one of the smaller waterfalls came down. By stepping on the tops of rocks in its froth, one could get, in the rear of the torrent, into a grot, where the greenery grew very vigorous and gay from the perpetual spray; and when I had followed Esmé's career into this hollow in the rock, she hollaed into my ear in opposition to the tons of thunder sounding down: "Now, listen a little: this one is named 'The Ape.' "

For some minutes—three to six—I heard nothing but the burden of the cascade's murmur, and was now about to say something sceptical, when there sounded what I am bound to say affected me in a rather startling way—a sound very sharp and energetic—the *chuckle, chuckle* of a monkey—most pressing, most imperative, in its summons to the attention. It was over in a moment; but presently came again: and in the course of half an hour's listening it came altogether five times, not quite at regular intervals, but still with

a kind of periodicity: and I concluded that some small cause, perhaps only a condition of the wind, acted ever and anon to modify the cataract's tract, and produce this curious cackling.

My pupil hollaed to me: "And if you kept on waiting to hear, and listening to it, do you know what would happen to you, Miss Newnes?"—and when I asked what, she called: "You would go stark mad!"

"Not I," I said.

One of the shadows darkened the child's face; and presently she remarked: "I should, I know. Three of the ladies of the Listers, and one of the Lynns, have—among them my mother's mother. It is in the blood, I think."

I started!—for I now suddenly believed her. Indeed, to my consciousness, there was something ironic in the torrent's chuckle, and at once, taking the child's hand, I said: "Come."

Late in the day when we were together in what is called "the Great Hall," Esmé, ever sage beyond her age, again spoke of the chuckling cascade, begging me not to mention, or show it to her Cousin Huggins when he came: for a young man of this name, who had hardly been at Hargen since he was six, was coming from India in some months, and was expected to spend a month with us.

It was that night that, for the first time, I saw Sir Philip Lister: for he dined with Esmé and Mrs. Wiseman and me in the main building dining-room, the old Davenport waiting upon us in state with his silent footsteps, we five making a pretty insignificant group in that great room, whose array of windows have a south aspect upon the south quadrangle. It has (or had) tapestry all round, and rows of Jacobean

carving-tables, which give the room an air of very gloomy state; and a wood-fire bickered on the iron-work fire-back, under whose oak over-mantel Sir Philip sat with Esmé and me ten minutes, then took himself away into his own sequestered nook of the house.

Two days after this he again had dinner with us, and again the day after that; but that third time the child, in one of her chatterbox fits, chanced to observe that "Uncle Philip is lending his presence since Miss Newnes has come"—and like a bird that shies Sir Philip showed himself no more to us for many days.

I regretted this, for his presence interested me, his manners were in such a high degree grave, dignified, and gracious. He was big, and, if not handsome, interesting to the eye—quaint, one might say—his face smooth like an actor's, his hair longer than usual, with great owl-eyes, whose glowering underlook was thronged, to my thinking, with mysteries of sorrow—something shifting, though, uncandidly shy, in them. His age I guessed to be about forty-five.

He was engaged in the writing of what I heard was "a great work," six volumes long, on "The Old Kingdom" (fourth of sixth dynasty of Egyptian Kings), and lived a life of such privacy, that it was three weeks ere I met him afresh. Meantime, Esmé and I entered upon the course of our adventurous studies—"adventurous," for never for two hours together was my pupil the same girl. Esmé had fits of headache; and she had fits of reading, when she feasted upon volumes with a hungry vulture's greed; and she had fits of indolence, dormouse torpors, fits of crying, dark-minded lamentations, fits of flightiness, of crazy dissipation, of craving

for—wine. As for her knowledge, it was astonishing in such a child, and she anon plied me with queries to which I could find no reply.

On a forenoon in the fourth week, when she was feeling out of sorts, we were sauntering in the park, when, for once, I saw Sir Philip out of doors. We came upon him with his face against the ape-house netting, gazing in at the gibbon—so eagerly, that we were near him ere he seemed to hear us. When he suddenly saw us, he stood struck into a posture as of suspense, but presently was very affable in his reserved manner, and conversed with me some minutes about the apes and their various traits. They had the names of Egyptian kings, the chimpanzees being Pepy II. and Khety, and the gibbon Sety I.; and at the gibbon Sir Philip shook his finger, saying with a playful solemnity: "*That fellow! That fellow!*"—I had no idea what he meant.

Suddenly, in the midst of our talk, he—with a certain awkwardness of his lids—proposed a picnic-luncheon out of doors to which Esmé and I readily assented. But three minutes afterwards he started, furtively murmuring the words: "I must be getting back to work," and was gone—to my astonishment!

After this he again made himself very scarce for three weeks. Esmé and I, meantime, got into the habit of spending our hours of labour in the great hall, sitting on a day-bed that lay in the solar-room gallery there—the gallery from which of old one gazed down upon the retainers at table below; and those days of my life, that I whiled away in that place, are to me at present days touched with much strangeness and a tone of Utopia. But the great place was quite plain

and empty—a plain ceiling, plain white walls, oak-panelled half-way up: only, as it was lighted by fourteen great windows with shields of painted glass, when the sun glowed through them, it transfigured that old room into glory-land. . . . But it is gone from me now like a dream, and I shall not see it again.

It was on the Thursday afternoon of my thirteenth week at Hargan that I received from Sir Philip Lister a singular missive: he had injured his thumb, he said, and wished to know if I would "kindly write from his dictation." But what, then, I asked myself, was to become of Esmé meantime? I did not wish to leave the child! However, I could not say no: and so entered that day the sacred den. He, with his fingers in a sling, instantly jumped up with a gush of apologies, showering upon me a thousand thanks that were at once gushing and shy, till the shyness triumphed, and he was suddenly silent and done. Then, I sitting at an old abbey-table, he on an old farm-house settle, he dictated to me with his eyes closed, in a low tone, all about Khufu, and Khafra, and the things of "the Pyramid Age," until I had the impression that he was himself something Egyptian and most ancient, and I with him, and in which age of the world we were I was not at some moments certain. In the midst of the dictating he all at once pressed his left palm upon his forehead, as if tired or muddled, his eyes tight shut; and, jumping up, he muttered to me, "thank you! thank you!" offering me his hand. Some of his actions had a wonderful swiftness and suddenness; and that hand of his which I touched was as chill as snow: so that I made haste from him.

That night I retired, as usual, soon after eleven to my

room, which was in a rather remote and lonely region of the house; and was soon asleep. Two hours later I awoke terrified—I could not quite tell why—but so terrified, that I found myself sitting up in bed—with a singular sound, or the memory or dream of a singular sound, lingering about my ears: and I was trembling, my brow was wet with sweat. Through my two windows, which stood open, shone the full moon's light, lying over the floor, lighting the stamp-work tapestry on my right; and I could hear the night-breeze breathing drearily through the leaves of the cedar, some of whose branches, held up with chains, brushed my panes. For some minutes I sat so, hearing my heart beating in my ears, the breezes shivering through the tree, the streams showering, the soundlessness of the house and hour, and as conscious of some living spirit hovering round me as though I saw it. If it had lasted long, I must have lost consciousness, or else cast off the oppression of it with a shriek: but presently something reached my ear—a chuckle, a little giggle of glee, just distinct enough to convince me that it was due to no lunacy of my ear: and immediately, with a creeping in my hair, but a species of rage and desperation elevating me, I was out of bed, and at one of the windows: for just after the chuckle a sharp rush through the leafage of the cedar seemed to reach me, and I rushed to see.

What I saw made me faint—whether instantly or after some seconds I cannot say: I know that when I came to my senses I was seated on the floor with my forehead leaning on my old oak chair, and the tower-clock was now sounding the hour of three. But however soon I may have swooned after seeing it, it was not so instantly that I could have the slightest

doubt as to the actualness of what my eyes saw. For though the moonlight left the interior regions of the tree's leafage in some obscurity, I was sure that some brute of the ape species with a pale face was hanging there in the cedar—hanging head-downward among the network of chains and branches in such a way as to see into my chamber; and I have an impression of hearing—either before I fell, or through my swoon afterwards—a succession of chucklings; and then a voice somewhere remonstrating, pleading, commanding, in a secret species of shout; and then a strangled outcry of horror, of anguish, somewhere, all mingled with a dream of the chuckle of the chuckling stream.

But the strongest of my impressions was undoubtedly that drowning outcry of horror—an impression so strong, that I could hardly believe it to be a dream, or all a dream. This cry was somehow connected in my mind from the first with old Davenport; and this feeling was confirmed in me when Davenport was nowhere to be seen the next day, nor for four days after. Mrs. Wiseman, the housekeeper, who for days was pale, and occasionally fell into a vacant staring, told me that Davenport was "suffering." She asked me no questions as to the night, but I twice caught her eye piercingly bent upon me with a meaning of inquiry, of anxiety, in it; and the same thing was true of Sir Philip when, three days later, he appeared towards evening: for he took my hand with a tender solicitude, and a lingering look of question in his gaze. As for Davenport, when I next saw him it was under a tree in the park, where he sat like a convalescent, in his flesh that pathetic pallor of the flesh of aged people who have passed through an illness; and the wrappings round his neck could

not wholly hide from my eyes that his throat had been most brutally bruised.

During those days it was as if a blow had fallen upon Hargen. Esmé no longer laughed, and a lower tone of talk overtook us all. It was obvious that each held the consciousness of a secret which none dared breathe to another; and in vain I consumed days of musing in seeking to see into the meaning of these things. For my part, I was ailing, nor could quite hide it. I had the thought of moving out of my room, which I now shrank from entering even in the day-time, but did not care to show so openly that I was afraid. Through the nights I burned a light, but slept with my nerves awake. Not that I was ever of a very nervous temperament, I think: but terror infected me like a sickness in those days; the stare of eyes of affright in the night was ever present in my imagination; and Hargen soon grew to be to my haunted heart the very home of gloom. Then one day, on a sudden, all this trouble of mind rushed away from me like a shadow; and my being galloped into a mood of gladness in which gloom was abolished, and I forgot to be appalled in the dark.

I will tell of it very briefly. It happened that one afternoon when Esmé and I were sitting listlessly in that solar-room gallery, an open grammar lying idle between us, suddenly behind us, there rose out of the floor, as it seemed, a young man who clapped his fingers over Esmé's eyes, smiling with me the while. "Cousin Huggins!" the child cried out—much surprised, for Huggins Lister was not expected at Hargen for some days yet. He caught her up in his big arms, and busied her like a gun, for he was a being made all of ardours

and horse-play: and then he looked into my eyes, and I looked into his eyes.

It was as if I had always known him—long before I was born; and what hurried me more into the sort of maelstrom in which I was now caught was the circumstance, that on the day after that first day Esmé took a chill, remained in bed, and I was all alone with Huggins Lister in that wilderness of Hargen. The young man was, or pretended to be, interested in old things, and would have me show him all the cassone and old needlework, the Spanish glasses giving their glints of gold, the old girandoles with their amorini. He dined with me, we two alone, and Mrs. Wiseman: for Sir Philip more than ever kept himself to himself. Only, on the fourth evening when Huggins Lister and I were walking in the park, Sir Philip suddenly appeared before us, walking with precipitate steps the other way; did not pause, nor utter a sound, as he passed by us with a bowed brow, his hat raised; but when he had gone some way beyond us, he stopped, and—shook his finger at us! was going, too, I am sure, to venture to say something, but failed; and suddenly was gone on his way again. I remember being very offended at the moment: but a moment more, God forgive me, had forgotten that Sir Philip Lister lived.

I showed the young man the apes, and the Queen's Room, and the cascades, save one, and the ivory inlay of the two Spanish chests, and the Tudor fireplaces, and what was in "the long gallery"; and still he wished to see things. And just under the window that lights the great staircase, there stands on the landing a sedan-chair painted with glaring

variegations, the window-glass casting the gauds of the six coats-of-arms of the Lister-Lynns upon the already gaudy chair: in which chair he got me to sit—it was high noon, on the open stair, but we were as solitary there as if night veiled us in a monastery; and, indeed, all that waste of Hargen seemed but made to beguile and mislead our feet to our fate—he got me to sit in it, I say, and then, having me well in his bondage in the sedan-chair, began to sob to me with passion; and when I hid away my face for pity of him there in his passion on his knees, and dashed one wild tear from my eyes, the young man ravished my lips with his lips, there in the chair on the stair that day. I could not help it, for in respect of me Huggins Lister came, and saw, and conquered! and I was as one drugged with honey-dew, and dancing drugged, in Huggins Lister's hands.

Also, the young man persuaded like a hurricane! and hurried me as madly into marriage as those sand-forms of the sand-storm which madly waltz into oneness. Within six months, he said, he would arrange everything so as to proclaim the marriage; but meantime it must be secret, and must be immediate! Against this tyranny I made a feint of resistance; but half-heartedly; and it availed me nothing: indeed, he was dear to me, and near, and had me all in the hollow of his hand and heart. And so one forenoon I stole out of Hargen gates, and met him at a house in St. Arvens townlet, the place of our marriage; but, as we were passing out, married, from the door of the house, my heart bounded into my mouth to see Sir Philip Lister walking hardly ten yards away. Yes, he who never left home was there before my

eyes in the broad light in St. Arvens street with his oak-stick—walking away from us, indeed, seeming unaware of our presence: yet I have an impression, too, of his head half-turned toward us a moment, of a face ashen with agitation: and my heart, for all its warmth, shivered as with a mortal chill in me.

My reeling feet led me back to Hargen in a kind of dream, a wedded wife, as wild with thoughts as with wine that day, for I was my beloved's, and he was mine: and in what way I spent that day I could not say, since I was new in heaven, and can but remember my fruitless efforts to hide from Esmé's eyes the state of my mind: for she had lately risen from her ailment, and I made a pretence of study with her, and I was severe with my dear, denying him my presence until the evening; and even then retired betimes, leaving him sighing.

My chamber-door I barricaded with a chair—a bridal childishness, since, to secure the room, I should have locked it. And I lay awake for a long hour, looking at the luminosity of the full moon, until, wearied out by the reel of my day's dream, I fell into a brief sleep.

From this a roar awoke me: and may a sound like that sound never more come to me to summon me with its trump. I understood that some soul was *in extremis*, and out of the deeps of grief and horror was horridly appealing to his God; and, finding myself on the ground, I knelt one wild second, crying aloud: "Almighty God, guard my love from harm in this house of horror." A moment more I had thrown a gown round me, and was gone out of the door.

As I ran along the corridor, trying to strike a light to the candle that I carried, there seemed to reach my ear from somewhere a chuckle very hushed and low, like the jackal chattering over its carrion; and my fingers were so shaken by this thing, that they failed to bring the match into relation with the candle's wick. When the heat reached my hand I dashed down the match. Still running, I lit another—or half lit it: for in the instant when the match fused at the scratch, I saw—or in some manner knew—that some mad and monstrous animal was with me; at the same moment the match went out, or was puffed out; and a thing most chilly cold touched my skin. I felt pain then, the pain of the awe of the darkness; and I stood palsied. But within some seconds, I think, I was rushing afresh toward the corridor-end, without the candlestick now, which had dropped from me; so that I could not see that the portal at the end, which I expected to be open as usual, was shut; and I rushed with a shock upon it. It was not only shut, but locked!—finding which, I, standing there, piled the passion of my whole soul into cry on cry, crying "Huggins! Sir Philip! Davenport! Huggins!" then I stood, hearing the streams murmuring as through eternity in the silence of the night, and the strong knocking of my heart against my side—but no reply to my calls.

This was not very astonishing, as my room was in such a solitary part of the mansion: and I stood imprisoned, suffering, expecting every second the coming upon me of that which would strike me dead with fright. The stillness lasted half a minute, perhaps, and then I became aware of a sound outside the door, a bumping going down the stairs in a regu-

lar way, like something massive being dragged down, with bump, bump, bump: and such was the solemnity and mystery of this thing to me in my solitude there in that gruesome gloom, that to linger any longer there in my pain soon grew to be impossible to me; and before I knew what I was doing I was out of a window, moving along a ledge fifty feet aloft toward the next window. The ledge was scarcely more than a foot wide, I think, and how I dared it, and why I did not fall, I can't now say. With my nose close to the wall—conscious all the time of drizzle tossed by high winds, conscious of the night full of a wild light, though the moon was quite hidden—I stepped flutteringly along over thin snow in dizzy suspense, keeping my sob until I should reach the next window: and there, as I leapt, I gave it vent, and fainted at my safety. I did not cease to hear, though, the bumping sound going down; and when it got to the bottom, something in me gave me the dauntlessness of heart to go after it.

Down I crept, haltingly, crouching, stair by stair. Half-way down I seemed to hear something being dragged over the floor below. I went on down. The sound had now gone out through a doorway, and I knew which doorway; but as I followed that way, my bare toes struck upon something cold, and I dropped upon my hands over it. I moaned then for pity of myself, because it was dark, and because I did so suffer. But I was conscious, as I dropped, of a rattle of matches, for I still had the match-box in my hand, without knowing that I had it: and the desire took me to strike a light. It was some time, though, before I would, or could, and when I eventually ventured, I saw the sight of the body of

the old butler in his night-attire lying wildly before me on the floor: and I knew by a look that was in his eyes that they were for ever sightless.

At the same moment I was aware of the slamming of a door some way off; and again I knew which door—the little side-portal by the kitchen-entrance, leading out northward into the park—and again something gave vigour to my knees, and lifted my feet, to go to see. I made my way to the little portal; opened it slowly; my soles were out on the snow. And before me on the short gravel-path going north into the park I distinctly saw the pale ape, bearing a body against his breast. A moment later he laid down his heavy load, and bent over it; and when I saw him horribly muttering over it, something in me stooped, took up a stone, and threw it at the brute.

It went straight to his head.

After some seconds the creature raised himself slowly, and raced with reeling feet into the darkness of the park.

I staggered then to the body, and saw that it was Huggins Lister strangled; and on the body of my beloved my senses left me.

It was ten in the day before I knew anything more; and then I lay on a bed, on one side of it Esmé, on the other side Mrs. Wiseman.

The latter had a fixed stare; and from the manner in which Esmé was smiling, with her face held sideward, while she persistently counted on her fingers, I could make out that the child was now insane.

I lay still, I said nothing; little I cared.

Presently a girl named Bertha entered to murmur the words: "He isn't found yet"; and from some words murmured in reply by Mrs. Wiseman, I gathered that Sir Philip Lister had disappeared.

Little I cared, I lay still and sullen, with closed lids.

Near noon again came the news that the men seeking for Sir Philip Lister could even yet discover no trace of him; but at about five in the evening he was found dying in the hollow of the rock that lies behind the cascade that they call "The Ape," and was brought to the Hall.

Very soon afterwards Mrs. Wiseman, who had then left my side, flew in again to me with crying eyes, imploring me to try and go for a moment to the dying man, who was hungering to have one sight of me; and I let her throw some clothes over me, and was led by her to the death-bed.

By this time I knew—for Mrs. Wiseman during the day had revealed it to me in a flood of tears—that Sir Philip Lister's mother had too much listened to the chuckling cascade, and so had borne him the being he was—a being capable at any agitation of shedding his human nature to resume the nature of the brute, and hurling away human raiment with his human nature in the murderous turbulence of his nocturnal revels—he who in my eyes had been so perfect in gentleness, so shy, so staid! But none the less I shuddered to the soul when he touched my hand to pant at me through the death-ruckle rolling in his throat: "I have loved you well"—a shudder which perhaps saved me from death or from madness, for I had lapsed that day into a mad apathy. It was nearly night then, and the light in there was

very dreary; but I could still see that the hair which overgrew the ogre's frame was considerably more than an inch deep—greenish, and gross as the gorilla's. It clasped him round the throat and round the wrists in lines perfectly defined, like a perfect coat of fur that he wore; and it did not thin, but continued no less thick where it abruptly ended than everywhere else.

But he had "loved me well," and I him now—for if he had been perniciously jealous, it was for love of me that he had been jealous; and in dying he looked into my eyes with human eyes, kindly, mildly, looking "I have loved you well"; and when with his last strength he pointed to where the pebble I had flung had sunk into his skull, then I lifted my voice and wept to God because of him, and myself, and Hargen Hall and all, not caring any longer if my face was buried in the horror of his hairy breast. And so he died, and Huggins Lister, and I was left alive.

The Case of Euphemia Raphash

"Man's goings are of God: how can a man, then, understand his own way?"—PROVERBS.

"OH, MR. Parker, he is coming at last, sir!" the house-keeper said; and I: "God! the doctor?"

"The Doctor, sir," she said—"saw him myself—he is on foot—must have passed through the north-park gates, and is at this moment coming up the drive!"

I ran to the lawn; saw him slowly coming in the old frock-coat of flimsy stuff, his gaze on the ground.

"Ah, Parker,"—he glanced up and held out a limp hand—"Well, I hope."

"I am well enough, thanks, Doctor."

"But why the accented *I*? My sister, Parker?"

I was astounded! "You have not, then, heard?" I asked.

"I have heard nothing."

"In heaven's name! In what land have you, then, been?"

"Parker, in a land fairly far away."

I said nothing more, nor he. He felt fear—fear to ask the question which I felt fear too answer; and we moved together into the gloomy home, an ancient place in ruins, the home

of a race most ancient; till in the room we called "study" he seated himself on our sofa, and with complete composure said: "Now, Parker—my sister."

"Miss Euphemia, Doctor, is no more."

His face was stone; after a minute I distinctly heard him murmur: "I thought as much. So it happened once before."

What had? Heaven knew! I only added: "Three weeks ago, Doctor."

"Of what?"

"She was—"

"Say it."

"Doctor, she was—"

"Oh, say it, man—she was murdered."

"Doctor, she was murdered."

I see him again now—spare and pigmy, grand in forehead, which at the top bristled with a scrub of iron-grey; yellow shaven face; and those eyes, grey, so unquiet, never an instant still, a name high in the eye of the world among the hierophants of learning. During the fifteen years of my secretaryship, we had produced ten books, every one monumental in its way. His energies, in fact, might be called vast—though I don't say steady, or at least not steady so far as I was concerned: for anon, perhaps in the midst of some work, he would suddenly vanish from Raphash, without warning, nor at such times did I ever know whether it was some Old Dynasty "find" that had enticed him overseas, or excavations at Mycenae, or at Khorsabad, or at Balbec: I knew only that he was gone, and that in due course he would as quietly be back again at his labours.

An old "lady-housekeeper" and myself, besides the Doctor and Miss Euphemia, were the only inmates of the old place, for we occupied only an insignificant nook of the ground-floor of one of the wings. Never a visitor broke in upon our solitude, except one man, whose calls always corresponded with the Doctor's absences. The lengthy *tête-à-têtes* of this gentleman with Miss Euphemia led me to suspect an ancient flame, to which the Doctor had had objections.

Miss Euphemia was a lady of forty-five years, taller than her brother, but remarkably like him. She, too, had become learned by dint of reading the Doctor's books. I cannot now say how it was, for they hardly ever exchanged a word, but I had arrived at the certainty that each of these lives was as necessary to the other as the air it breathed.

Yet for three weeks the newspapers had been discussing her disappearance, and he knew nothing of the matter! He looked at me through half-closed lids, and said, with that dryness of tone which was his: "Tell me the circumstances."

I answered: "I was away in London on business connected with your Shropshire seat, and can only repeat the depositions of Mrs. Grant. Miss Raphash had, strange to say, been persuaded to attend the funeral of a lady, known to her in youth, at Ringlethorpe; and, staying afterwards with the mourning friends, did not return till midnight. She wore, it seems, some of the old jewels. By one o'clock, however, the house was in darkness; and it was an hour later that a shriek reached Mrs. Grant's ears. She managed to light a candle, and had opened her door, when she saw a man rushing towards her with some singular weapon in his hand which flashed in

the half-dark—a little man, she thinks. She had but time to slam her door, when he dashed himself frantically against it, whereupon she fancies she heard the angry remonstrance of another man. Here, however, her evidence is vague; some hours later when she woke to consciousness, she rushed to Miss Raphash's room, and found it empty."

"Of the jewels?"

"Of Miss Raphash herself."

"And the jewels?"

"They lay on the dressing-table where they had been placed, untouched."

"Clearly the murderer was not a burglar."

"Clearly he *was*. He, or they, took other things, valuables from your room and mine to the amount of four hundred pounds."

"But some of these have been traced?"

"Not one. Some have been found—none 'traced.' "

"Where found?"

"In a clump of bushes immediately beneath the balcony of the south wing."

"They were singular burglars. And my sister's body was found—"

"Nowhere."

"It was buried in the park."

"Quite certainly not. The park has been subjected to too minute a scrutiny for that."

"It was burned."

"Not in the house, and again not in the grounds. It was for some ghastly reason conveyed away."

"It is not *now* in the house, for instance?"

"No—if the most recondite search in the darkest recesses of the mansion are of any value."

"There were blood-stains?"

"A few on the bed."

"No clue?"

"One. It would seem that the assassin, or one of them, before gaining entrance, drew off his boots, and, on running away, left them, for some undreamable reason, behind him."

"It is very simple. He went in a pair of yours or mine."

"No. Had his foot, as measured by his boot, been one-third as small, it could never have been forced into a boot of yours or mine."

"Yet Mrs. Grant says he was a small man; it is peculiar he should have so huge a foot."

"It seems clear that there were more than one."

"Yet I incline to the one-man theory: for through some failure of courage or memory, one might have left the jewels but hardly two. Mrs. Grant, being distracted, may have mistaken his stature; and in the course of my anthropological experience, I have even come across that very discrepancy between man and foot—the survival of a simian trait."

"There is another point," I said, "the boots were found to be odd."

"But that is a clue!" he said. "I have the man in my grasp. Have you now told me everything?"

"Except that a gentleman had called to see Miss Raphash that afternoon."

"Ah—what sort of man?"

"Tall, black-dressed, middle-aged, with side-whiskers. I have seen him here when you have been away. Mrs. Grant says that Miss Raphash spoke to him with some show of anger, though no phrases could be made out."

"Ah!" said the Doctor, and resumed a restless walk.

"It is not impossible," he remarked after a while, "that deeps, dark to the eye of a policeman, may become visible to the eye of a thinker. Let us go over the house."

Science had habituated the Doctor to labour without the stimulus of expectancy, and in this search we spent hours in the vastnesses of the house, the stillness of wings which perhaps no step had set barking with echoes for centuries, down in the vaults. We came at length to a room on the second floor of the south wing overlooking a patch of shrubbery—a room very damp and gloomy, its arras rotted to grey shreds. The Doctor had used it as a depository of bones, embryos in formalin, fossils, implements of stone, and bronze. Along one side was a chest, which, as well as a recess behind a panel in the wall, contained piles of bones, all labelled.

The lock of the door was of special construction, and the Doctor had the key ever about him. I could not therefore but smile, when on entering, I said to him: "Here, at least, our search is fantastic."

He glanced at me, and passed in doggedly to a gloaming where the light that struggled through the grime of the window-glass hardly lit bits of armour, or grave-stones of Etruria showing in the gloom grey freckles of fungus, a dank dust covering everything.

"Someone has been here," said the Doctor.

"Doctor!"

"The catch of the window seems awry; notice the dust on the floor."

"But it is impossible, it is impossible," I answered.

He opened the window. Below was the balcony of the first floor of that wing, from which a rain-spout ran up; and it was among the bushes of the shrubbery just under the balcony that the stolen valuables had been discovered.

"He climbed up, you see, by the spout," said the Doctor, "the feat seems superhuman: but there is the spout, and here the turned window-catch. We must confront phenomena as we find them."

"But at least, Doctor, he did not climb up with a dead body in his arms?"

"No; you are right."

"And he did not enter by the door."

"No."

"Then our search here is absurd."

"Doubtless. You might look behind the panelling."

I looked, and saw only the bones of old bodies.

"She is not *in here* now?" he said, and tapped the oaken chest with his knuckles.

I smiled. "No, Doctor, not in there. The man does not live who could open with a key *that* lid."

"Come, then, Parker. Come—we shall find her."

We moved out, and he locked its old solitude within the room once more.

Men of great intellects undertake tasks which, from their very largeness, seem simply pig-headed or silly to men of smaller gauge. The region of the impossible, indeed, is the

real sphere-of-action of genius. But, on the other hand, the crowd may be excused if, in such cases, they become incredulous, resentful, nay, cachinatory.

And, I confess, it was not without resentment that I listened to Doctor Raphash when he said to me: "Let us find *him*, Parker, the murderer of my sister, the secreter of her body. This is a task which we must not relegate to the intellects of the recognised authorities. Let us hunt *him* down—and, *after* that, we shall resume our studies."

But his method, at least, was singular. To acquire personal intimacy with a whole class of individuals is an undertaking which, if possible, is the tallest order! But this was his notion; and in a few months we had learned a new language, become denizens of a new world—the language and the world of the East of London. Our dress was the dress of the navvy; our habits those of the ne'er-do-well.

And now were revealed to me the deeps in Doctor Raphash's character. The intensity of his hatred of an unknown man! "Let us hunt *him* down," he said, and his life became the incarnation of that sentence—a fury bordering on lunacy behind the scientist calm; the avenging angel *without* the flaming sword.

Days and nights we spent in public-houses, gambling-hells, cells of pawnbrokers, with roughs at slum-corners, crowds at music-hall doors. We were pals of rascals who related to each other without secrecy or shame their achievements in every species of felony. In the mornings we parted; to compare late at night notes of the day's haps. Then far into the morning I would hear the slow cheetah-step of that

divine patience stealing to and fro in his chamber near mine. This, and a heightened glare in his eyes, were all the indication he gave of the mania flaming in his heart.

One day I heard something. It was in a gin-palace where two women, dissolute pigs, gossiped upon their pots.

"And how about your old man, then?" I heard.

"Oh, he must fish for hisself, he must. I took his boots to the pawn this morning, and they wouldn't take them."

"Ain't they no good?"

"They're good enough, but they're odd."

"Go on!"

"I near tore his eyes out over them same boots. I buys my lord a seven-and-eleven pair in the summer and sends him hop-picking in them; lo and behold! two months ago he turns up with his own boot on the right foot and somebody else's on the other."

"And what account did he give of hisself?"

"There's where the provoking part of it comes in. Every time I asks him, it's 'Drop it, mate.' He was on the job, you may bet, got into some scrape, and now dursn't say nothink about it."

I need not mention the steps by which, in half an hour, I had become the bosom friend of these two women. The time, place, and circumstances of the boots profoundly impressed me, and when I separated from them I doubted not that the name and address I had obtained were those of the man we wanted. When Doctor Raphash got back haggard to our garret that night, I pressed his hand.

"You have news for me, Parker."

I told him the incident.

"Let us go," he said.

"You look tired to-night; to-morrow perhaps—"

"Not at all! To-night, man—*now*—is the time to find what we seek"—and he stamped on the floor.

I glanced, startled, at him, for the action was like a sign of the break-up of that serenity which characterised him.

We passed out, I with a revolver. When, by way of a labyrinth of streets, we reached the address, the Doctor at last spoke, saying: "There is no light, you see: he is, probably, still out. Suppose you wait till he comes; then speak; take him under the lamp there, see the boots, and ask him to drink with you. I, waiting at yonder corner, will then join you."

Flakes of snow were floating downwards, while I strolled sentry-wise, and the Doctor crouched at his post. From a Swedish church near I heard the strokes of twelve, and at the same moment a working-man approached me.

"Cold to-night, mate," I said carelessly.

"Ah, that it is," he answered.

His teeth chattered—his cheeks wore a blue hue. Turned-up coat collar, and pocketed paws, and forward pose, spoke of his Polar unrepose.

"You look frozen. Come and have a drink along wi' me."

"I could do with one, mate. Not tasted grub this blessed day."

"What—broke?"

"Dead broke!"

"Come along then—the Brown Bear."

He followed me. Under the lamp I stopped.

"Like the Brown Bear? If not—"

The light fell upon him, and a sense of contempt and disappointment overcame me at the sight of his weak face, sheepish eyes. But there at any rate, were the fellows of the two odd boots which I had handed over to the authorities. The Doctor had been slowly approaching us, and was now in the middle of the road when Hardy, glancing, saw him.

The change in the man's face was sudden and wonderful: his eyes stared, he clung to a railing; then, suddenly taking to his heels, fled, as for life, down a side-street.

The Doctor followed, and then I. And now powers of physique, as unexpected as previously depths of soul in my old friend, stood revealed to me. He distanced me. His feet grew winged. Hardy, indeed, had an advantage in his knowledge of the intricate streets down which he dodged and sometimes for a moment disappeared; but the Doctor slowly won upon him, "hunting him down," till suddenly, Hardy dashed into a cul-de-sac, of which the house at the end was empty, every window broken. If the fugitive, then, could gain an entrance there, his escape by the back was safe, and I guessed that this was the house for which he had all along been making. And, in fact, on reaching it, Hardy dashed down the area-steps to a basement below the street-level.

"Shoot!" cried the Doctor, looking back at me: "shoot with the revolver!"

This I was far from willing to do, but it was already too late: for Hardy had disappeared. A minute afterwards we, too, had darted down the steps, and through a door sped into a cellar of which the ground was powdery dust, covering our ankles. There seemed no other means of egress, and I was

looking about for Hardy, when the door banged suddenly behind us, and a bar clanged down into a staple outside.

That the man had entered the cellar was certain, also that he had had some means of leaving it other than the door. But here our knowledge ended. The blackness was Erebus itself; clouds of dust rose at our every step and choked us; and soon the intensity of the cold, after our race, made speech nearly impossible. I groped round the walls, shot off my revolver, but the flash revealed nothing but a portion of unhewn wall and low ceiling; I howled at the door; but the neighbouring houses were ruins—an echo answered me.

Towards morning I received, I confess, a thrilling experience of horror from Doctor Raphash. That he was not himself, that he suffered more than I, had become apparent. Once or twice only had he spoken through the night, seated in the dust in a corner, his knees bent up, his head buried in his arms. By palpation I knew him to be in this position.

Once I said in alarm: "Doctor, do not sleep! This cold—"

The Doctor laughed aloud. "No, no," he said bitterly; "no sleep; little fear of that to-night."

I walked for warmth to and fro, treading warily on the dust. Then a groan drew me to him, and my cold fingers touched his forehead with the sensation of contact with something hot.

"You are suffering terribly," I said.

"Leave me alone, Parker!"

An hour, and I knew that he was stalking fast up and down all the length of the cellar; swiftly! filling it with a continuous smoke of dust: and long I stood mute, noting his

faint sounds on the ground as he came, losing them, following in fancy the growth of his cloudy progress, guessing that now he was here, now yonder. His mutterings guided me. He seemed to forget my presence.

When the air finally became unbreathable, I moved to go to him, and in this act my head came in contact with something, which on catching I found to be a rope hanging down. Unable to divine its purpose, I succeeded after many efforts in climbing it, my head struck the ceiling, and feeling round with my hand, I encountered what seemed the panels of a trap-door. The means of Hardy's escape now flashed upon me. I pushed with my knuckles, and some light entered. In another minute I was free on the other side—it was already day.

A strange, pale face peered up at me, rolling wild eyes. When I had drawn him up, together we passed out to the street.

Here he suddenly seized my hand.

"Parker!"—his pantings came in gasps—"be a gadfly in your tenacity, as you love me, man! Hunt him down! Good-bye. . . . Madman! do not follow!"

And before my brain could wake from its depth of stupor, he had dashed furiously down the road, and vanished into a passing cab.

After Dr. Raphash's mysterious desertion of our quest when success seemed near, I merely returned to the Towers, and waited. I know, in fact, considered my duty done when I had described to the authorities the fellow with the odd boots, who at this time was in hiding.

It was a month afterwards that I remarked one evening, as I was walking about the grounds, that a man, hearing my approaching footsteps, had ducked his head from me in a clump of bushes—the very bushes, by the way, in which the stolen things had been discovered.

I was accompanied by a mastiff: so, on coming close to the spot, I said aloud: "Do not run, simply rise, and hold your hands over your head. I happen to be armed—and you see the dog."

The crack of a gun would have much less astonished me than the hang-dog air with which he rose before me. I recognised instantly the insipid face of Hardy.

"No offence, master," he said, touching his hat, trembling like aspen.

"We have met before, Hardy."

He scrutinised my face, but shook his head.

"You know me better'n I know you, sir."

"Well, Charles, you must come with me," I said, and led him by the arm into a room of the house, instructing Mrs. Grant at the entrance to send for a couple of the rather distant local police. I then closed the door, and proceeded to examine my prisoner. The creature wept!

"Now, Hardy," I said, "dry your tears, and tell me how you came to be in those bushes to-night."

"I was looking for the rings and things. It was hunger drove me—they've been hunting me like an animal for the last month, and I give myself up."

"What rings?"

"The rings I dropped in those bushes. I thought that,

anyway, one of them might by chance be left there still."

"You admit the burglary, then?"

"Yes, master, I admit it. It was my first, and it will be my last. I haven't had a moment's peace since. I even put up a rope in an old cellar to hang myself, only I'm a coward—"

"And you admit the murder?"

"Murder, master?" he cried with a sacred face. "Why, it wasn't *me* as did the murder, it was one of the other two, and didn't I nearly drop dead with fright when I see it done?"

"There were, then, two others?"

"Yes, sir, a working-man such as myself, and an old gent."

"Tell me about it."

"I and a mate of mine, sir, came down hop-picking—one of your wild chaps, and hops was too slow for *him*; so he says to me as how some of these country-houses was mere child's play, with plenty to be got, and not much danger, so one night here we stood behind a shed, waiting till the old lady was well asleep, when all of a sudden, as if he'd sprung out of the ground, this old gent stood between us. I started running; he looked like a spirit to me; but Jim, he stands his ground, whistles to me, and when I come up, he ses, 'Ere's a lark, Charlie,' ses he, 'old chap's on the job hisself!' 'Partnership's a leaky ship, Jim,' ses I; but he only ses, 'Oh, bother, live and let live.' Well, I and Jim get our boots off, we all get inside, and no sooner inside, than the old cove takes the lead, showing the way, telling us what to do, me and Jim doing everything he tells us, nat'ral like. He knew every crick of the place! and first he takes us into a room, and ses he, quite wild like, 'Plunder now! raven and harry!

to your souls' content!' Then he reaches down a case from a shelf, and takes out a strange, shiny knife, locks the case again—I believe he had keys to every lock in the place—and rushes out of the room into the one opposite. 'Queer chap, that,' ses Jim, looking queery hisself, 'gives me the shivers,' and before I could tell him I felt sure the dove was a devil or a ghost, we hear a struggle going on in the opposite room—someone gasping—then a great shriek which I ain't ever going to forget. Immediately after, out he flies with his wild eyes, and dashes hisself on the other old woman's door yonder. Jim, with the cold sweats on him, he plucks up courage to reason with him a bit, but no go, the old cove spurts back to the murdered lady, and dashes out again with her in his arms, a gash showing all across her chest, her grey hair trailing on the ground. And now he comes up to us, and, lofty like, ses he, 'Marshal yourselves before me—march! march! and I will show you where treasures lie thick for yer 'arvesting!' and he makes us walk before him across the building into the other wing and up two stairs, till we come to a room with a lot of bones—and, there, Great God! hide me! there—*there he is!* He'll kill me, as he killed my mate—he'll kill you, too—"

He stared wildly about, rushed behind my chair, and crouched down there, the man's shriek of panic horror thrilling me through, as the ponderous door swung slowly open on its hinges, and Dr. Raphash calmly walked into the room.

"Well, Parker," he said in the old cold tone, "here I am again, you see. But whom have we . . . the murderer caught!"

and triumph lighted his eyes as they rested on Hardy, who, pallid and panting, at present lay propped upon the tapestry.

"Yes, the murderer!" gasped Hardy, "but that's not me! Oh, there's plenty of proofs, if it comes to that! That coat's the very one you had on—have you washed the blood off the sleeve yet?"

Dr. Raphash sat down, barely smiling, examining the face of Hardy. Presently he looked at his arm.

"Remarkable thing," he said, talking to himself: "I *have* noticed a stain on my sleeve; it cannot be blood; Parker, see."

But, as for me, a mist hung before me: I could see nothing.

"It *is* blood," continued Hardy, gaining courage from the Doctor's calm—"you know it is, or perhaps you were too mad that night to know anything. Who but a madman would have carried the lady's body all the way to that old chest; and didn't you chase Jim round and round the room and stab him like a dog, because you said one body wasn't enough to fill the chest? And if I hadn't slipped down to the balcony by the spout, wouldn't you have killed me, too? and didn't you look out of the window and tell me to prepare myself because you was coming, and didn't I have to jump from the balcony to the ground, rolling over, and dropping all the things I had? and didn't I just have time to draw on two of the boots, and they odd, when you ran down and started after me?"

I was looking at Dr. Raphash: during this categorical charge, no sound had issued from his lips; but gradually a pallor as of death had overspread his face, whose muscles became tense and fixed; his head tumbled forward, his legs

stretched rigidly from his body, the stony glare in his eyes giving to his face an aspect of rhadamanthine grimness ghastly to see.

I ran and grasped the clammy fingers in mine; but he did not recognise me. So he remained for several minutes, no breath breaking the stillness there.

Then, still rigid in all his limbs, he raised his head, and let it drop heavily back over the back of the chair; and, with this action, there burst from his blanched lips—higher and higher, peal on peal, in shrillest staccato—carillons of laughter.

With creeping flesh, I seized Hardy by the arm, rushed—faint—from the room, and locked the door upon the ruin within.

In this way Dr. Arnot Raphash hunted down the murderer of his sister; and so, with him, fell the Jewish House of Raphash in the county of Kent.

Some days later I received a letter, of which the following are extracts:—

" . . . When I tell you that I am the proprietor of the private asylum from which this letter is dated, and a cousin of Dr. Raphash, you will at once conjecture that his (to you) strange absences from home always corresponded with his voluntary sojourns in my establishment. He well knew the warning symptoms—head-pains, a high temperature, etc.—and he usually had two or three days grace before the definite onset of the malady. Sometimes, again, the attack was more sudden, especially when preceded by any excitement; thus,

when he reached my establishment a month ago he was already mad, and I at once divined some violent agitation. . . . His first paroxysm occurred at the age of thirty when he destroyed a just-married wife by cyanide-vapour poison . . . In the sane state he had no recollection of his insane acts, which were distinguished by a mania to kill, directed mainly against those for whom he most cared. He never knew anything of his wife's doom, for he was at once placed under my care, and on returning to the Towers found her already interred. . . . When he was leaving me 'cured' after his sister's death, I deemed it prudent to tell him nothing of that death, preferring that the journey to the Towers should intervene before the shock of the news dropped upon his newly restored powers: hence his ignorance of this thing. . . . You have probably seen me on my visits to Miss Raphash when the Doctor was away from home, my object being to give her those minute reports of her brother's progress which alone could console her. On the very day of her tragedy I had a rather angry argument with her regarding the good of putting her idol into irons, she deprecating, I insisting. Unfortunately, I permitted her to influence me, and her death was the consequence, for it is now beyond all doubt that the Doctor escaped from my establishment that night, though how he contrived to pass out of the house and grounds and then into them again without detection is still unexplained; but then to his cunning there were no bounds . . . I need only add that I shall soon have the—pleasure of telling you of the death of Dr. Raphash; for the end cannot be delayed. . . .”

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